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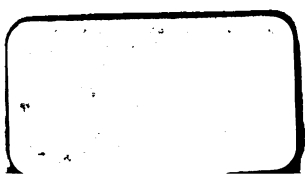

CHRISTIAN SOLICITUDE;

AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE

THIRD CHAPTER OF THE EPISTLE
TO THE EPHESIANS.

BY THE LATE

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PREFACE.

In the years 1841, 1842, 1843, and 1844, the late Rev. James Harington Evans preached in John Street Chapel a course of Sermons on the whole of the Epistle to the Ephesians; and during the latter period of his life he began to prepare from brief notes of these Sermons, a plain practical Commentary on this important portion of the epistolary Scriptures.

This attempt, however, proved too arduous for his then very delicate state of health. In a letter addressed to a beloved brother in the Lord, dated, Edinburgh, July, 1849, he makes the following affecting allusion to this effort:—"I have," he says, "omitted answering your kind letters, but from another cause—the Ephesians. The Ephesians serve to occupy me; they

more than occupy me, they exhaust me; that little of me, and little in me, seems left. I know you will be glad to be informed that I have really made a beginning * * * Soon after I came here I had an amanuensis; but I found it so awkward, and so exhausting too—for he was unable to make out my notes, and I was obliged to dictate to him—and it so tired me that I was obliged to desist from that plan. That which I pursue is far better. My wife is my amanuensis, and as she heard the sermons, the plan answers pretty well, and the thing advances. Though it is but a mite that I throw into my Lord's treasury, it is all my living."

Even this arrangement he found to be too exhausting, and the effort was very soon relinquished. After drawing up a general outline of the whole Epistle, he proceeded as far only as the eleventh verse of the first chapter. This fragmentary portion of the intended and greatly desired Exposition, is printed in the volume of his "Memoirs and Remains," edited by his son, the Rev. James Joyce Evans, A.M.

It is greatly to be regretted that Mr. Evans

should have been able to prepare for publication only so small a portion of these Sermons, which so characteristically embodied—what he in his general outline says of this Epistle—"A summary of Gospel truth as beautiful in its essential character as in its graceful symmetry and connected order. Privileges being based upon doctrine, doctrine upon the free mercy and most essential love of God, and streams flowing forth from this fountain-head, all holy obligation is insisted upon to a life of dedication and entire consecration to God and his glory; and what is this but the sum and substance of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God."

These Expository Discourses, as well as other sermons preached by Mr. Evans, some of his hearers were in the habit of taking down in short-hand as they fell from the lips of their beloved pastor, for the purpose of assisting their own after meditations, as well as that they might be "able after [his] decease to have these things always in remembrance."

Of these Sermons on the Third Chapter, in which the Apostle evinces an affectionate and prayerful

solicitude for the welfare of the saints, to whom the Epistle was addressed, with some additional remarks, from notes of other Sermons preached by Mr. Evans on the same subjects, the following pages are the substance. These, have been collated, and embodied in their present form; and the proof-sheets submitted to Mrs. Evans, of which that lady has most kindly expressed her approval.

Adopting the language of the beloved and honoured servant of Christ, from whose lips these words of truth and grace have been transcribed, the Editor begs to lay "this little offering of love on the altar of the accepted Victim, commending it with deep humility to the blessing of that Spirit, without whose unction from above, no effort can prove any effectual blessing to the souls of men."

May 1, 1856.

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CHRISTIAN SOLICITUDE.

I.

The Prisoner's Plea.

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles."—EPHES. iii. 1.

THIS epistle was addressed by the Apostle Paul to the Church at Ephesus—a people who had formerly been given up to the most licentious practices and abominable idolatry. In his travels from place to place the great Apostle of the Gentiles visited this city, in which stood the temple dedicated to the goddess Diana, considered to be one of the wonders of the world. Here he faithfully and successfully preached unto the people

"the words of the Lord Jesus." For the space of three years he resided among them, labouring night and day with tears and many prayers; teaching them "from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and to the Greeks repentance toward God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." And such was the blessing of God upon his labours, that a large and flourishing church was founded through his instrumentality.

How he loved these Ephesian saints, and how greatly desirous he was that they might be built on the one only Foundation, and receive an "inheritance among all them which are sanctified," is abundantly manifest from this epistle, which was written to them under circumstances which give to it a touching interest; it being composed and transmitted by the Apostle while he was a prisoner at Rome.

And what wisdom as well as affection does the Apostle display throughout every portion of it. Like a wise master-builder, he not only manifested great wisdom in

laying the foundation, but he was also equally wise in the superstructure he built upon it. In the first chapter he sets forth the glorious and distinguishing doctrines of the free, sovereign, and boundless love and grace of God. He thus encourages them by reminding them of their unutterable blessedness and the source whence it springs. He begins, as it were, by a shout of thanksgiving, adoration, and love: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." So that we see that he blesses God, not for temporal mercies, but for spiritual blessings; not for *some*, but for *all* spiritual blessings; for all things pertaining to that heavenly kingdom, of which the Lord Jesus is the sole and all-glorious sovereign; which blessings are realized by all believers, by virtue of their union with, and faith in him. The

source of them being the free unmerited grace and love of the Father; the channel through which they flow, the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not one spiritual blessing springs from any other source or flows in any other channel. Having given an inventory of these blessings, and traced all these streams of grace and goodness to their source—the electing love of God, he proceeds to assure them that the same power that was put forth in raising Christ from the dead was exerted in them as believers, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment.

In the second chapter he reminds them of what they once were. It was not his aim merely to comfort the saints of God, he also desired to lay them low; therefore he calls to their remembrance the "horrible pit," and the "miry clay"; and he further intimated to them that the great spiritual change they had passed under, and what they were now, was solely the effect of the grace of God; thus he reminds them of their

once forlorn and wretched condition as unconverted sinners: "Wherein in time past ye walked, according to the prince of the power of the air"—led captive by him—"the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath"—as deserving of wrath to the very uttermost—"even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved.)" He then instructs them in that great mystery of the Gospel, namely, the union of Jew and Gentile in one Church, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the glorious Head, and in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, circumcision nor uncircumcision; but that both Jew and Gentile, "through him have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

In this and the succeeding portions of this epistle, the Apostle urges upon believers practical godliness, on the ground of privilege; for it will be most apparent to all, that those who are here urged to preceptive obedience, are addressed in the previous chapters as the elect of God—as the redeemed of God—as the accepted of God—as the regenerated of God, and also as the sanctified of God; so that he bases the several important exhortations with which the latter part of this epistle abounds, upon the exceeding great and precious privileges of which they had become possessed; and no other Gospel foundation than these is there on which to build the superstructure of a holy life. Thus it is that obedience becomes to the child of God a most exalted part of his privilege. Holy precepts when regarded in the spirit of child-like obedience, so far from being grievous, constitute one of the greatest privileges of the Lord's family. O beloved, consider it as thy mercy to have preceptive obedience

urged upon thee when thou dost stand in need of it.

It is remarkable to observe, that in the fourteenth verse of this chapter, the Apostle prays most earnestly for their sanctification: "For this cause," says he, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Not only did he thus beseech God on their behalf for personal holiness, but he besought them in the following chapter to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called; and in this spirit of prayerful solicitude for their increase in spiritual attainments he begins the chapter by reminding them that he was at that time enduring great tribulation on their account; was a prisoner in defence of that very Gospel which he had preached to them and which he loved, for their sakes; and as such he laid before them the deep obligations they were under to yield themselves to God.

In making some general remarks on the verse, the first thing that strikes us is, the

humility of the Apostle: "I Paul," he here lays no stress upon his apostleship, but, "I Paul," "your brother," "a prisoner." How true it is that when man elevates man, it tends to elate him and fill him with self-importance; but when God elevates man the tendency is to abase him. When the Apostle is called upon to defend himself against the calumnies brought against him, he can magnify his office; and so ought we to vindicate our reputation if it be unjustly assailed. When however the Apostle writes, as it were, in the freeness of his heart, it is simply, "I Paul." In writing to some other churches, how fond he seems to be of the word servant! Thus in his epistle to the Church at Rome, he begins — "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ." And in his epistle to the Philippians, he puts young Timothy — born yesterday in comparison of himself — with him as "fellow-servants of Jesus Christ." So he begins his letter to Titus—"Paul, a servant of God," as if he thought it a far higher honour to be a servant than an

apostle. And so it is, for Judas was an apostle; but he was not a servant of Jesus Christ in the proper sense of that designation—he was a servant of Satan. Oh! how lovely is the grace of humility; the more a man is led by the Eternal Spirit to lie low in his own estimation, the more is he exalted in the eyes of God's saints.

But observe also there is a still more lowering view that he takes of himself—"a prisoner." We must not suppose that he always lived in his own hired house; he knew what it was to be incarcerated in a prison. He here seems to glory in the designation; and no wonder, beloved, for our Lord, in his Sermon on the Mount, said to his young disciples, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake: rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." And how truly did this great Apostle find his joy in it!

When Luke, the beloved physician, his companion and fellow-labourer with other of his brethren, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem, where bonds and imprisonment awaited him: "What mean ye," said the lion-hearted soldier of the cross—"What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." As if he had said, I can stand the felon's chain, I can stand the headsman's sword, I can stand against wild and raging beasts of prey, I can stand against all forms of torture; "none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me so that I might finish my course with joy;" but I cannot stand against your tears!

Let us now turn from the servant to the conduct of his adorable Master whom he faithfully served in the Gospel, and shall not we admire the sovereign grace manifested towards one who had been a "persecutor," "a blasphemer," and "injurious"? We here see

what a wondrous change the grace of God can effect; the lion is turned into the lamb, the vulture into a dove; we see him gentle as a nurse, and patient as a tender mother nourishing her child. He was not only a servant, he was a preacher; not only a preacher, he was an apostle; not only an apostle, he was a prisoner; and he was soon to be a martyr. We not only see the power of converting grace displayed in this wonderful transformation of his heart and life, but also what the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit could work in him; here was a saint, and a saint of no common order. While we thus admire the sovereignty, the riches, the invincibleness, of God's grace, let us, beloved, remember that the same grace is sufficient for you and for me. The same gracious help which was thus vouchsafed to Paul is promised to us also; even grace to sanctify and satisfy our souls; grace to fit us to serve God on earth, and to meeten us for dwelling with him for ever in heaven.

Observe, further, *for what cause he was*

a prisoner. Was he a bad citizen? Not he. Was he a bad subject? Not he. Why then was he in prison? "For this cause," he says; for the sake of God and his truth—because he loved Christ—because he lived Christ—because he preached Christ—and because he preached unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. If you turn to the twenty-second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, from the nineteenth to the twenty-second verse, you will see it was because he had been declared to have pulled down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. Until he had told the Jews that his commission was to go "far hence unto the Gentiles," they gave him audience; but then they lifted up their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." We may here see how selfishness and bigotry will turn men into brutes.

The Apostle had formed a correct estimate of the dignity and importance of the service in which he was engaged. He knew that no

service can be so honourable, none so worthy to suffer for, as the cause of God and truth. I am aware that there may have been much pride, much vanity, and much self-complacency on the part of some in putting themselves in the way of being persecuted for the sake of truth; but when a Christian is called to suffer persecution for his religious convictions, to suffer for that truth in which the honour of Jesus and the glory of God is involved, talk of heroes—talk of patriots—they all sink into insignificance, when compared with the individual who is willing to bend his neck to the yoke of Christ, though it may be to bring that neck under the persecutor's sword.

But there is in this passage something which is very endearing and touching. He was a prisoner *of* the Lord Jesus. This feature in the Apostle's description of himself reminds one of a passage in the Canticles: "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." It seems as if the Apostle did most fully enter into the sweetness of

that truth; all that Christ has is mine; his power is mine; my bonds are his; his liberty is mine; He watches over me by night and by day; when I droop He revives me—when I wander He brings me back. The Apostle needed all these sources of strength and comfort. How much we lose by deifying the humanity of Christ; and so, also, by attaching so much interest to the character and office of the Apostles, we seem to regard them not only as saints, in common with all believers, but we are ready to think them well-nigh faultless. Not so, however, did the Apostle Paul consider himself when he reminded the Corinthian Church, that he was with them "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." There is scarcely any expositor who does not seem to think it degrading to the Apostle to consider him weak—but on this point Acts xviii. 9, 10, is explicit, direct, and unanswerable. To inspire his trembling heart with courage and confidence in his work, the Lord spake to Paul in the night by a vision: "Be not afraid,

but speak and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee." The Apostle was a bold man—but a bold man is not always free from fear. He greatly needed as we have said, this heavenly consolation—he needed to be assured that the Lord was with him, aiding him in all his arduous and exhausting labours, and protecting him in all his dangers and tribulations. The thought of this it was that cheered and comforted him.

But, further, there is something more than all this involved in this interesting designation. As he was a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ, so he was eminently honoured of his Divine Master, who did not disown him nor forsake him, but favoured him with many and frequent visits during his imprisonment. It is remarkable to observe how many of his epistles were written while he was in prison. The Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon were all dated from a prison. He must have had, during his confinement, large communications from heaven. So true is it,

beloved, we little know how much of God may be shut up with us in our sick chambers.

But we are led in our observations one step further—he considered himself to be "a prisoner of *the Lord*," and felt that he was altogether in his hands. He knew nothing that was before him, or that was to befall him. The mysterious, uncertain future, he heeded not.

We remark, further, on whose account it was that he was held as a prisoner; "for *you Gentiles*." He was greatly concerned for their sanctification; and as already intimated, he mentions this as the argument by which he would urge them to "follow holiness, without which no man can see the Lord."

Let us now endeavour to deduce from the preceding observations such conclusions as the Eternal Spirit may vouchsafe to own, and apply. We see that *there is no sinner's case, however desperate, that can be pronounced hopeless.* Here was a murderer, a blasphemer, yet the grace of God was

mighty, and abundantly displayed in his behalf. This is his own acknowledgment; "Howbeit I obtained mercy." By the omnipotency of Jehovah's love and grace he was drawn out from the multitude and separated to the service of the Lord. In these respects he was, as he considered himself to be "a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Jesus Christ to life everlasting;" so that in him and through him God should have glory through time and through eternity. "This," says he, "is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering," &c. To whom, beloved, is the encouragement given but to poor, miserable sinners; and if any doubt it, remember that the Apostle says, "of whom I am chief."

It is a solemn consideration that there are many who have heard scores and hundreds

of sermons, yet to this hour have never regarded the Gospel message worthy their acceptation—who have never closed with Christ—have never felt their need of the grace and righteousness of Christ. If, my poor brother, you should be one of these neglecters of this "great salvation," remember that the true cause of your impenitence is your love of sin—your love of the world.

There is, moreover, a very blessed truth made known to us in this passage;—we perceive that *the grace of God is sufficient for all his people under all circumstances and conditions.* It could change this lion into a lamb; it could make him who was the chief of sinners the most eminent of saints, and one of the most successful preachers of the Cross. How true it is that it is not, in any circumstance, either to give peace or to hinder its enjoyment. Paul was in prison, but the Lord was with him there. His soul was nothing daunted at the sight of his chains; the unconfined spirit had he; though a prisoner he had access at all times to a tender and loving

Father; and the highest state of liberty is when a man pours out his heart unto God as a Father who loves him and pities him.

Observe, that *suffering stands more or less connected with the service of Christ.* Sooner or later, believer, there will be periods in thy life, when thou wilt know that thou art called to endure much tribulation for Him who endured all the bitter pains of death and hell for thee. Pray against softness—that softness that so turns away from a cross which you may be called in providence to carry. The love of ease it is that makes difficulties, and fears the lion which itself only sees. Let me affectionately commend to your attention and adoption the course enjoined upon believers by the Apostle Peter: "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound,

they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."—2 Pet. i. 5—8. If you look also at the tenth verse, you will observe that the reason this course of practical godliness is enjoined upon you is, that you may make "your calling and election sure." But what is the first grace that he recommends? "Add to your faith *virtue*"—by virtue, understand courage — fortitude. Why does he put it first? Is it not because believers may have desired greater conformity to God while, as yet, there has been but little progress; and you, my beloved brother, may remember how you have become afraid of taking up the cross for Christ,—so, to use the expression of Haggai,—while you have been putting money into your purse, you have "put it into a bag with holes."

Further; we here see that the *chief consolation of a child of God, in whatever situation or circumstances he may be, is in Christ.* He can say, all that Christ has is mine; his righteousness is mine; his pardoning love

is mine; the fulness of his grace is mine; his cleansing blood is mine. Possessing Christ, we have all things, and strengthened by Christ, we can do all things.

Observe, lastly, *how unselfish the Gospel is*. One would have thought that the Apostle might have been disposed to spend his time in reading and meditation—in communion with God—in thinking how soon he might be brought into the amphitheatre and given to the lions; and no doubt he did sometimes think of these things. Yet see how his concern for these Ephesians overtopped all other considerations. How should this teach us not to be swallowed up with our own little trials. The Apostle's greatest proof of love was not in saying kind words to them, but in his great desire, his deep and anxious solicitude for their sanctification; for we never show so much love towards our Christian brethren as when we evince a tender and prayerful concern that they may possess a larger measure of spirituality.

II.

The Preacher's Mission and Theme.

"Ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given to me you-ward:

"How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in a few words,

"Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

"Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

"That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

"Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."—

EPHES. iii. 2—8.

THE words from the second to the seventh verse are a sort of introduction to the eighth,

upon which I purpose more particularly to enlarge. The Apostle had spoken of himself as a prisoner. He now speaks of the mystery on which he subsequently enlarges; he tells the Ephesians how this dispensation had been given him by special revelation, alluding doubtless to the twenty-second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, from the seventeenth to the twenty-first verse. This mystery was then revealed to him, respecting which, at the close of the third verse, he refers them to a previous statement made by him in the first chapter, from the ninth verse, and continued by him almost throughout the second chapter of this Epistle.

We may here observe, that the great subject of which he speaks is *salvation by Christ*, which he informs the members of the Church at Ephesus, as he also did the Church at Colosse "in other ages was not made known to the sons of men as it is now revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." It

may be necessary to remark, that a "mystery" signifies not merely something that is mysterious, but something hidden, though it may afterward be fully revealed; such was the Gospel itself, it had been hidden for ages in prophecies, in types—yea, hidden in the bosom of God from all eternity; but now in the Gospel is fully made known, and clearly revealed. It must, however, be admitted that the mystery of salvation, embracing Jew and Gentile, was revealed in other ages, although but partially and with comparative obscurity. In Isaiah the forty-second chapter, and the sixth verse, Christ as Mediator, is thus addressed by the Divine Father, "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;" and in the forty-ninth chapter, and sixth verse, "And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for

a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." It was revealed also in the eighth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, and the eleventh verse, "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." More decided declarations of the calling in of the Gentiles there could not be; but it was never so clearly revealed as at this time to the Apostles and prophets—not the prophets of former times, but the prophets of that day; as saith the Apostle, in the eighth verse, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

From this statement it is very evident, that *the great doctrine of the Apostle's preaching was the riches of Christ.* By this observation I do not mean that he never preached any other subject than that which was *directly* of Christ, but that Christ was the

one grand and principle theme of his ministry. What the Apostle ordinarily preached is stated in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth verses, in which you will find that while "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," he also preached "concerning the faith in Christ." And so, when reasoning with the philosophical Athenians, unto whom he declared that "the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent; because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." Observe how he ended his discourses on repentance with preaching Christ; his heart was full of Christ, and therefore his lips were full of him. Whether in his preaching he propounded doctrine, it was Christ; whether he unfolded the promises made to the fathers,

it was Christ; whether he enforced the precepts, it was Christ. The Apostle was determined to know nothing among men, not to preach anything to men, but Christ.

He not only preached Christ, he preached the *riches* of Christ—the essential riches of Christ as God. If you look at the second chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians, and the first chapter of his Epistle to the Colossians, you will at once see that he preached the essential glories and Godhead of Christ. But he also preached the mediatorial riches of Christ, all of which are communicable and communicated. Who could so fully and so blessedly enlarge upon them as the Apostle Paul did? How ample and explicit are his statements of the atonement of Christ! How sweetly he discourses on his incarnation, his humiliation! How fully and explicitly he sets forth the doctrine of free justification by the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to, and received by all who believe on his name! In the perfec-

tion of his obedience, and of the sacrifice he offered on the cross, and in the permanency and prevalency of his intercession, in his union and relation to, and sympathy with his people, what a glorious High Priest he sets before us; "for," saith the Apostle, "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." With what amplitude of illustration, and strength of argument, he enlarges on salvation, full, free, and everlasting! A salvation for whom? Not for the good and the deserving, but for the undeserving — the hell deserving. And while earnestly contending for the freeness of salvation, he not only declared a free election, as in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the sixth verse, but he wrote two whole epistles on free justification; at the same time fully demonstrating regeneration to be not of works, but entirely owing to the mercy of God. "Not by works of righteousness which we have

done," saith the Apostle, "but by his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." This was his uniform method of stating the great subject.

Nor did he preach other than a *Holy* Christ. "For," he says, "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Thus the Apostle, in his preaching and writings, gave line upon line, and precept upon precept. He entered into the minute detail of a believer's life, and into his secret walk. Does he not say—"Without holiness no man shall see the Lord?" And how does he deal with sinners? When writing to the

Hebrews, he puts to them this searching and solemn interrogatory—"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" He preached among the Gentiles a Gospel for sinners, declaring "that Christ ever liveth to make intercession, not only for those who have through grace believed, but that "he is also able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

Observe *why it was that the Apostle considered it such peculiar grace that he should be counted worthy to be a dispenser of these untold and unsearchable riches.* The Apostle meant what he said, and believed what he said; it was not with an affected humility he speaks thus disparagingly of himself. Whenever, my brother, you attempt to pray, beware of uttering expressions which your hearts do not feel at the time your lips utter them.

I by no means believe that the Apostle, while thus writing of himself as being "less than the least of all saints," was looking back

on his unregenerate state. Some seem to think that he thus wrote as though he considered himself to have been the very vilest of men; and therefore he must have been the least of saints. I have no doubt, however, that the Apostle did look back to the "horrible pit," and to the "miry clay." And let me beseech you, my brother, to do the same. It is no small mercy to see a hell deserved, and a heaven given. It is not to be doubted that the Apostle reviewed his past life with great penitence as well as with devout gratitude; and as he looked back upon his past life, he thought of the depth of his obligations; he remembered what he had once been, and mourned that, at present, he was no more what he ought to be. And when he compared himself with his mercies and with his obligations, I have no doubt that he honestly felt what he then said of himself—"less than the least of all saints." He felt it a marvel of grace that he should have been entrusted with these riches.

Consider *to whom the Apostle was instrumental in dispensing these riches of Christ.* "Among the Gentiles." No doubt he was quite contented that Peter should continue to preach to the Jews; he reasoned thus: These Gentiles are amongst the worst of mankind—so was I; they are the vilest—and what was I? of sinners the very chiefest. It cannot be doubted but the remembrance of the past made it a matter of great joy to him to stand up amidst these heathens and preach unto them the unsearchable riches of Christ.

We may also consider the *extent of the riches* here spoken of; they are declared to be "unsearchable." That must needs be unsearchable which all the powers of man cannot fully discover; that must needs be unsearchable which even the renewed mind of the believer finds, and the inspired mind of the Apostle found, infinite and incomprehensible. If you consult Rom. xi. 25—33, you will perceive that the Apostle in concluding his reference to the calling of the Gentiles,

seems to be lost in the contemplation of this profound mystery. "Oh, the depth of the riches," he exclaims, "both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." These riches must needs be unsearchable, for the more we search into them the more inexplicable and incomprehensible they seem to be. There is a beautiful expression of the Psalmist: "Oh, how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men." What, is it future goodness?—are these riches to be dispensed at some future period? So some tell us; but look at the twentieth verse, it is *now*, "unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we" *now* "ask or think, according to the power that *worketh* in us."

We know that all lands can be traversed; all treasures can be counted; but the ocean is unfathomable: here, beloved, is an ocean

whose profound abysses no mortal or angelic mind can fathom—the incarnation! Oh, the depth of the mystery! God in my nature; in one sense the humiliation of the divine nature, and the exaltation of the human nature. The fulness of the atonement, the completeness of the sacrifice, the love of God in Christ, constitute "an ocean of infinities, where all our thoughts are drowned!"

Angels are desirous of looking into these things, and I believe that the riches of Christ will be telling out through the everlasting ages, and yet never be told out; they shall be the happiness and the glory of eternity. These riches must needs be unsearchable, which so far from being exhausted, are not even diminishing; the treasury is not one farthing poorer than it ever was; the weakest and the poorest believer is as much made the righteousness of God as ever. How wonderful then are these riches that completely enrich all that possess them. They make the poorest man wealthy; they turn sickness into health; they turn a

trial into a mercy; they make him who has suffered bereavement a gainer; they teach us how to live, and how to die.

If, my brother, God hath given thee to possess the best of all riches, give him the best; the best of thy time, thy talents, thy influence, thy property, of thy life, thy spirit, thy body, thy soul.

III.

The Students of the Cross.

"And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."—EPH. iii. 9, 10.

How language seems to fail the Apostle in expressing the great and sublime thoughts that were now occupying his mind! Ordinary words seem to have no meaning to him; in a sense he transgressed all laws of language, when speaking of himself as "less than the least of all saints;" and when speaking of the Gospel and its grace, he can only thus designate it—"the unsearchable riches of Christ"!—and in the nine-

teenth verse he thus labours for expression —"to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and that "ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

I will remark, just by way of explanation, that this word "mystery" some have rendered "mysterious fellowship"; but it is evidently the "mystery that had from the beginning of the world been hid in God"; and the fellowship here spoken of is that of Jew and Gentile. The Apostle did not preach this wisdom only to the Ephesian Gentiles, but to "all men" in every place; his heart as well as his mission was large. Oh, never forget, my brother, that largeness of heart is a good proof of grace.

There was another thing laid on his heart; he thought of the "principalities and powers in heavenly places," to whom this Gospel, in its nature and its results afforded peculiar delight; he considered how the future and more extended development of the Gospel mystery would be the joy of angels.

Oh! how blessed to know *that the Gospel is the great development of the wisdom of God.* All that God does must be wise, because he is the All-wise and the only-wise. His knowledge is immense—infinite; nothing can escape his omniscient glance; it pervades all subjects, all systems. If we look at creation, it is a wonderful display of God's wisdom. If we look at the stars and think (and we have a right to think so) that they are suns to other systems, and in all probability inhabited, the thought is so overpowering it seems to annihilate one. In the eighth Psalm David so expresses himself, as though he seemed to behold enough in the works of God to make him lose himself in the thought: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?" How many geologists forget all this. Alas! that many of the professed admirers of nature see not God in his works.

If we go still higher in contemplating the "manifold wisdom of God," if we look at his providence, what amazing proofs, without number do we discover of his wisdom! Who could bring any symmetry out of such distortion as we see every day? Who but the infinitely wise and eternal God could make that straight which man has made crooked? But every other consideration seems to sink into comparative insignificance before the greater displays of Jehovah's wisdom, as revealed to men in the Gospel.

In his first Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle says—"The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness: but unto those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Do you say this is said of Christ, and not of the Gospel? What is the Gospel but Christ embodied?

Again, in the second chapter of that epistle, the same subject is brought forward,

and is thus expressed: "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." The ninth verse, which is a quotation from Isaiah lx. 4, is often misapplied; it sets forth the depths that are in the Gospel. The "things which God hath prepared for them that love him," are here said to have been hid in God. It never would have entered into the heart of man to conceive of them. Even in his purest state I believe he would have accounted it blasphemy; and in his fallen state, he not only does not know it, but he cannot know it. But the angels desire to understand this great and glorious mystery (1 Pet. i. 12). They stoop to look into it; with devoutest reve-

rence bending their lofty minds to the study of this "manifold wisdom of God"

In pursuing these inquiries they are diligent and close observers of the Church upon earth, whose peculiar privilege it is, in some measure, to understand it; for it is revealed unto them by the Holy Spirit. So that, in this sense, "the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" must descend from heaven to learn this "wisdom." It is part of their heaven to do it; and they consider it their highest glory to be thus intently engaged in obtaining knowledge from the Church of this great and glorious mystery. In the eleventh verse of the fifth chapter of the Apocalypse, this statement of the Apostle is most fully illustrated and confirmed. Observe that the beasts and the elders are there represented as being nearest the throne, and that the angels are round about them.

Observe, also, in what sense it is that the Gospel is "*manifold*" wisdom. It is so especially, as it refers to the manifestation of

God himself. When Adam fell, and all fell in him, there is not a single attribute in God but what he in his apostacy seemed to pour contempt upon. What profound depths of infinite wisdom are displayed in the glorious plan of redemption in which sinners have been such great gainers, and the divine glory hath shone forth with tenfold brilliancy and lustre! Thus we see that there is not an attribute of God but is abundantly glorified in that redemption. While there was all in the one case to oppose God, there was all in the other to glorify him. I give one instance: God was especially opposed therein as a Lawgiver. The contempt thrown upon the law was thrown upon the Lawgiver; but when the Lord Jesus Christ obeyed the law, he stamped a new glory upon it, he "magnified the law and made it" infinitely "honourable." We may see, also, how manifold is the wisdom of God, when the very perfection that seems to shut us out of heaven, is the very perfection that takes us by the hand and leads us by a

safe path to our blissful inheritance, and at the same time secures heaven to us. Thus showing that while he is a just God, he is also a Saviour. And all this is accomplished in a most wondrous way; the covenant of works is not nullified or sullied in the slightest degree, it is fulfilled to its fullest extent by the Great Head of the covenant of grace.

There is one consideration on account of which angels must regard it as "manifold wisdom;" when they see that nature that was so degraded become so exalted. There can be no doubt but that Satan thought he had gained the victory, when our Lord, in the bitter anguish of his soul, uttered the cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and when Satan heard the exclamation, "It is finished!" no doubt he thought it was finished. But we see how, in the "manifold wisdom of God," he was taken in his own net, and caught in his own trap; for of the adorable Redeemer it is said that "through death, He destroyed him that

had the power of death, that is the devil." The angels show the interest they take in this unutterable wisdom when a poor sinner is converted, "for there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." How great is their joy when some Zaccheus is brought down from his high thoughts and proud imaginings to welcome the Lord Jesus Christ; and when the rebellious blasphemer is turned into a friend and advocate, what wonder and joy fill their exalted minds;—as doubtless was the case, when Paul the persecutor went to comfort the persecuted saints, by preaching to them "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

And not only at the first beginnings of grace in conversion, but in all its after workings, this manifold wisdom is displayed. In the work of sanctification, in meetening believers for glory, and in the restoring power and grace of the Holy Ghost, in causing the backslider to say with Ephraim, "What have I to do any more with idols," is there a continued revelation of this mys-

tery made to the "principalities and powers in the heavenly places." And who can say what their admiration is? Every saint of God is a wonder. To be preserved — to go on our way, not to turn *quite* back, and at last to be brought safe to glory—is a marvel in our eyes, and must excite the wondering admiration of these holy and benevolent beings.

There is also another point that must appear to them very wonderful; when they see Jew and Gentile brought in to form one glorious temple. And how they will rejoice over those poor Africans whom many professing themselves to be Christians have either been vaunting over, or cruelly oppressing, when they shall see hundreds and thousands of them brought to bend the knee to Jesus? Oh! how it will fill their hearts with adoring gratitude,—and it might fill ours also. And what will be their joy when the top stone is brought to the glorious edifice, as they join in the shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it?"

What is the highest element of heaven's happiness? Is it not in an increasing knowledge and enjoyment of God? Look at those high and lofty intelligences, compared with whom, in a sense, we are nothing! See how their glorious attributes and employments are described in the hundred and third Psalm! Their element is God's glory, their delight is obedience; yet this it is that forms the subject of their contemplation, "The manifold wisdom of God." Their knowledge, therefore, is progressive; there is but one who is Infinite—who is All-wise. How great, then, must be the folly and sin of those who pray to angels! What! pray to those who are learning of the Church?

As increasing acquaintance with God forms the element of heaven's happiness, it is our mercy, as Christians, to know that, while on earth we may, in the diligent and prayerful use of all appointed means, acquire a large measure of this heavenly wisdom. The effect that this heavenly wisdom will not fail to produce on your heart, my brother,

will be to strengthen and increase your desire to walk more closely with God.

This is the highest study of man. Science is well in its way—history is well in its way—but neglect not this great and glorious subject. Seek to acquire a more intimate acquaintance with the "manifold wisdom of God." Never lose sight of the great difference between angels and yourself; they have much of intuitive perception, yet much of their knowledge comes from their observation of others. This may also be the case with believers, in some measure; but oh! forget not that the great means by which God teaches his people is by deep and personal experience. Remember thy suitableness to Christ; thy weakness, thy feebleness, thy nothingness, thy sins, thy temptations, thy sorrows, thy trials, are so many proofs of thy suitableness to Christ, and of his suitableness to thee.

Observe it is called "*manifold* wisdom"—wisdom in all things, wisdom for all purposes, wisdom to every state of the believer's

experience, wisdom in every part, wisdom learnt out by degrees. Oh! remember for what intent the Lord has been, and is still, leading you about; it is that by little and little you may be brought to see the unfoldings of his manifold wisdom.

Remember too, my brother, that what you know of this wisdom is not to be kept, but made *use* of. Every day brings us into new scenes of conflict. When we lie down at night Satan slumbers not, if we slumber; when we rise in the morning Satan is vigilant, if we are careless and unwatchful over our spirit and conduct. He hopes he shall prevail to-day, though he was foiled yesterday. Oh! take then your every concern, your difficulties, your perplexities, your ignorance, to Christ. Trust your souls and circumstances with the God who cannot deceive you. The Lord make you willing, and with earnestness of desire, day by day and moment by moment, to learn out this manifold wisdom in his own way.

IV.

The Primal Blessing.

"According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."—EPHES. iii. 11.

ALL the streams of God's grace on earth have their springs in God's everlasting love. The Gospel is not a mere temporary expedient, or a hastily devised remedy, for an unexpected disease. The salvation of sinners, from first to last, is here, as elsewhere, declared by the same Apostle to be "according to the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." All the acts of God in time must be considered, in a sense, eternal, they being but the results of his counsels in eternity. So that when sinners are led to believe in Jesus, and to receive the blessings of sal-

vation, and realize them according to the measure and degree of their faith, it is the effect and consequence of their being chosen in Christ, and "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

But we stop; for what know we of a subject confessedly so mysterious? What perceptions have we of a Being with whom the past, the present, and the future are all one. If our hand cannot grasp the ocean, and our eye cannot take in the universe, how much less can the finite grasp Infinity: "Who by searching can find out God, who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" These are great and weighty truths, and of the utmost importance, but yet truths full of mystery, and the Scriptures abound with them; therefore we may not reject them, but should readily and meekly receive them as the engrafted word of God. This great and fundamental doctrine is much spoken against and vehemently opposed, but this should the more commend it to the children of God. Christ himself was an object of rejection; and I

believe this doctrine will also be so. But, beloved, never separate the act of God in choosing his people from his purpose in doing so. He hath chosen us in Christ Jesus our Lord before the foundation of the world, in order that "we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

There is ever to be a marked distinction preserved between the acts of God's grace and the acts of God's justice; while the salvation of the people of God is to be attributed wholly to the sovereignty of Jehovah's grace in election, his justice is due to all. Therefore while he says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy;" he never says, "I will be just to whom I will be just; I will be equitable to whom I will be equitable." His justice is due to all, and will be exhibited to all; but his grace is due to none. A God of justice can do nothing unjust—a God of love can do nothing unkind. Is not this sufficient to silence all questioning? Do you, my brother, stagger at this doctrine? Oh!

do not reject it; rather pray and wait for clearer light.

This choice is *personal,* and not national. With regard to the subject of national election, which is the idea some have vainly endeavoured to attach to the statements of Scripture on this subject, it is, I think, not difficult to show that to this the reference in our text cannot apply. It is not of nations or parts of nations to whom, in this verse and in some of the early verses of the first chapter of this epistle the Apostle is referring as of having been chosen according to his eternal purpose, but holy, regenerate individuals, tried and tempted souls, who had passed from death unto life by the mighty power of God, which could never have been said of any nation upon the face of the earth.

Besides, the blessings here enumerated as flowing from God's election are spiritual blessings, the highest blessings of the Gospel; such as adoption into God's family, redemption from the curse of the law, deli-

verance from the bondage of sin and Satan, from a sense of guilt and condemnation; the forgiveness of sin, holiness and unblamableness in love; in other words, the purpose of God in election secures, to all whom it includes, their being fully and for ever justified by the merits of Christ, and sanctified by the power of the Holy Ghost — their being translated out of the kingdom of Satan; from his tyranny, from darkness, enmity, and death, and introduced into a region of light, life, liberty, love, and everlasting glory. Where is there—where has been—the nation chosen to these blessings? No nation can be, until the Spirit shall be poured out from on high, and a nation be born in a day.

Now this election, as we noticed at the commencement of these remarks, is *eternal;* throughout this and other portions of the Scriptures, it is most explicitly declared to be *before the world begun.* It is not *now* that he hath chosen them, not according to a present design, but ac-

cording to "the eternal purpose," which God the Father purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The doctrine of God's sovereign and immutable choice of his people is *a doctrine according to godliness;* it has in it all the elements of holiness. The very *design* of God in our election is, that we should be holy. Infinite mercy and infinite holiness are inscribed upon all the distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel. The salvation of God must be worthy of God, and must everlastingly secure holiness of heart and life in all who are interested in its great and glorious privileges. God's own nature and attributes demand this; for he could not delight in his church unless it were made like himself. And our nature and happiness demand it; for it is impossible for us to delight in God unless we resemble him. Not to delight in what is pleasing and acceptable to God shows an unhappy and an unsanctified mind. The design of God, with regard to himself, was his own glory. The work of redemption is to issue in the glory of his grace, while it

secures the restoration of man to that dignity, holiness, and bliss which by sin he had lost. These grand results constitute God's great purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord before the world began.

It is also the *tendency* of the doctrine to make us holy. In its influence upon the mind it is most self-abasing; and the holiest of all states of mind is a willing submission to the sovereignty of God's grace,—feeling ourselves the clay, and that he is the potter. The language of all who are the "called according to God's purpose" will be, "though many things be lawful, yet if they draw me off from God they are utterly inexpedient." Oh, beloved! if the Lord hath chosen thee, it is that thou mayest be "a partaker of his holiness." Thou wilt not need to be directed to, or driven by, precept to know what holiness is. Thou wilt find thy chief *motive* to holiness is to be found in the doctrines of grace. If these doctrines are laid upon our hearts they must lead us to God; nevertheless, the believer will not think lightly of the precepts, for they

are also holy; for while the motives to holiness are to be found in the doctrines, the *directions* thereto are contained in the precepts. They point out the conduct of God as our pattern,—as in the Sermon on the Mount, "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The Holy Ghost speaks the same language in and by the Apostle in other of his epistles: "Be ye followers of God as dear children." Unto whom are "given exceeding great and precious promises, that by these they may be made partakers of the divine nature." It is most manifest that it is to the election of grace that the promises belong. "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and of spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The providential dealings of God with his people have the same holy tendency: "For we know," says the Apostle, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are THE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE."

God's choice of his people is altogether *unconditional.* It could not have been from faith foreseen, for faith is amongst those spiritual blessings with which the Lord hath blessed his people in Christ Jesus. It could not be on account of what he gives that he chooses, that would be to make the effect the cause. It could not be from holiness foreseen, for it is not written because of that which was holy—but "that we should be holy."

Nor does this doctrine of Jehovah's free, sovereign, and eternal choice of his people unto salvation in the slightest degree sully the purity of God's grace, or place the least obstacle or hindrance of any kind whatever in the way of the coming sinner. Even to those who are yet in the way of transgression, who have turned their backs upon the cross, and are seeking death in the error of their way, there is nothing in this doctrine to encourage them in their sinful courses, nor to hinder them from seeking and obtaining mercy; and as to those who feel the

weight and burden of their sins, if discouraged thereby, it is only Satan who puts election between them and the cross.

We may observe yet further, that there is no other doctrine, nor any other view of truth in the word of God, that stands opposed to this truth; while no other view does so effectually exclude the doctrine of merit. For it might fairly be said, that if one individual is placed exactly in the same advantageous position as another individual, and he make his advantages effectual—I see not how you come to any other conclusion —that he is the author of his own salvation. So that let men say what they will as to the doctrine of merit, it can only be excluded by that which gives the whole glory of man's salvation to the free, electing love of God. And moreover, no other view of the method of salvation gives to the seeking soul such positive security. And I am fully persuaded, in my own mind, of this truth, that notwithstanding all the abundant and suitable preparation God has made in the

Gospel feast—though it be ever so richly provisioned and the guests be bidden—yet, were it not for this doctrine, all would make light of it, and not one soul would be saved.

Oh! beloved, never forget that it is according to God's eternal purpose and grace that we are saved. There was nothing in you to merit or deserve it, but, on the contrary, everything in your sinful nature to hinder it—everything to prevent it. That any sinner should be saved at all is unutterable grace, considering what sin is; but that this purpose of salvation is in Christ, and that it is through the atoning blood of God's dear Son, is most stupendous mercy; and that this stupendous mercy should include this with it, that thou art thus redeemed and admitted into the family of God, one must say that if we could not see it written here, it would have been considered most daring presumption to have imagined it. And had we not sometimes the inward witness of it in our own hearts, so incredible does it appear, that one would declare it

altogether impossible. Oh! beloved, from what else could this choice of us in election spring but from his own abundant mercy and grace, even according to the good "pleasure of his will."

You see moreover, how impossible it is that the manifold wisdom of God, as displayed in the purpose, plan, and work of salvation, should fail of being fulfilled, and that the purposes of God are *infrustrable*. Jehovah has determined that his counsel and purpose in election shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. One generatiou passeth away and another cometh; men purpose and fail; they determine and change, but there is nothing of failure or change with God. With regard to his choice of his people unto holiness here, and eternal glory in the world to come, it is not only according to his eternal purpose, but also "according to the good pleasure of his will"; it is not only his pleasure, but his good pleasure; it is not only his will, but his pleasant will. He delighteth in his purpose and grace; he de-

lighteth in mercy; he taketh pleasure in the salvation of his people, and he will save them from their fallen and ruined condition according to his eternal purpose. He delights to manifest to them the riches of his grace; he viewed them in his Son before the world began; he saw them justified completely, and their poor imperfect services and attainments he looks at in his Son, in whom both their persons and works are acceptable in his sight.

While God's special love is seen in saving his people according to his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord, he is kind to all and unjust to none. Special love is a special truth; but it is equally true that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him" shall be saved. "Whosoever will may come and take of the water of life freely." This is Jehovah's gracious proclamation to sinners: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, for he will

have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "And him that cometh he will in no wise cast out."

But should any one be ready to say, "Well, if it be God's will that I am to be saved I shall be saved; if not, I must be lost," such an inference may appear very plausible and natural; but it is a sad mistake and an awful perversion of the doctrine. In saying it thou art, my poor unconverted brother, just giving expression to the workings of thy depraved heart; thine heart is not right with God, and that is the secret of your rejection of the counsel of God against yourself. Oh! do not, my brother, give way to a captious or speculative spirit. "The secret things belong to God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us," and should be gratefully received and cordially believed and acted on.

Why it is not in God's purpose to save all, is a depth never to be fathomed in this world. Presumptuous, self-exalting men, may cavil and let down their little plumb-

line into these depths, but they never will be sounded by their carnal reasoning. All that is in God's mind can be known only to himself. There are mysteries in God's procedure in providence and in his works in creation, as well as in his plan of salvation, and if man's proud reason cannot comprehend these, is it not presumptuous folly and pride to attempt to fathom the depths of Jehovah's purpose in salvation? But we may take his revealed will for our guide, and therein it is declared that he spared not his Son, but freely gave him to die, the just for the unjust; and that is a sufficient warrant for the vilest sinner that ever lived to seek the Lord.

V.

The Filial Right.

"In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."—EPHES. iii. 12.

THE Apostle here places before the Ephesian believers one of the great and distinguishing blessings flowing from the electing love and predestinating grace of God the Father, through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ; as realized by the regenerating, sanctifying, and sealing operations of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Consider the *greatness* of the blessing. It is the privilege of access to the Best of Beings. The term occurs only thrice in the sacred Scriptures. In the second verse of the fifth chapter of the

Epistle to the Romans: "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." In this place, the great end for which our access by Christ is brought forward, is principally for the purpose of pointing out the blessed effects resulting from it. It occurs also in the eighteenth verse of the second chapter of this epistle: "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." In this place it is to prove that this privilege has respect to our *character as children;* for this is the purpose which the Father hath purposed in Christ, that we might be "predestinated unto the adoption of children."

As all believers are declared to be predestinated to the character of children, so also to the *privileges of children;* and the distinguishing privilege of the children of God is that of access unto their Heavenly Father. It is a great thing to be pardoned, to be justified, and to have access unto God, the tenderest of fathers. He is not only good but goodness.

Oh, it is blessed to rise above the promise and to realize that God is better than his promise, and more precious than his gifts. What would worldly men give for the privilege of access to an earthly sovereign? and yet with all our loyalty we may ask, What is it worth? What, when weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, is its value? But to have access to the Best of Beings, to have access to goodness, to mercy, to the manifold wisdom, infinite power, unchangeable love, and boundless resources of the King of kings and Lord of lords, is to be honoured with a dignity and blessedness above all that earth calls good or great; and "such honour have all his saints."

O, beloved, if thou hast access to God, thou art superlatively blessed. Whatever be thy station, thy talents, or thy circumstances, thou hast not only access to God, but access to him under the most endearing character, and the tenderest relationship. It is a great thing to have access to the ear, the eye, the hand, and the heart of God;

yet there is something in this privilege that rises higher than all this, because it takes in all things and relationship besides. It is the access of a child to an everloving Father; to a Father's heart of pity and his helping hand. This is the highest round of the ladder that takes a man from earth to heaven. Here is a Father who never dies, whose affection never changes, whose patience never tires, whose compassions fail not, whose tender mercies are new every morning. Earthly fathers die, but our Heavenly Father "inhabiteth eternity." The love of the tenderest parents for their children is not always equal, kind as they may be to us, love us as they may however tenderly, yet there is sometimes not only the appearance of coldness but also the feeling of coldness; but with him "there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." O, ye tried and sorrowful children of God, dry up your tears; this tender and unchangeable love can remove all your anxieties, quiet all your apprehensions, mitigate all your sufferings,

this can make the bitter waters of adversity taste sweet, or cause them to lose their bitterness.

Access to God, then, is *the peculiar privilege of the children of God.* It is a distinguished privilege, it belongs exclusively to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is realized only "by the faith of him;" or, as it is expressed in the verse already quoted from the second chapter—"through him"—through faith in his mediation. The meaning of this is the same as "by the faith of him;" not the faith that Jesus himself possessed as man, and which he in the days of his flesh exercised in his Divine Father, but that faith of which he is the object; that faith which reposes in him, derives strength and grace from him, and yields cheerful obedience and submission to his will in providence and grace. Faith is a poor man's grace. Every other grace brings something; this brings nothing but an empty hand and receives a full Christ, and with him and through him, redemption, forgiveness, access

to God, all the blessings of grace in time, and glory everlasting. This privilege so realized and enjoyed is the greatest of all our mercies. All we know of pardon, of acceptance, of righteousness, all tend to this point. Oh! what would be the believer's condition if he stopped short of this? Holy love, holy fear, holy tenderness, holy watchfulness, holy simplicity, holy uprightness, holy repentance, holy self-denial and devotedness, are all the effects of drawing near to God. Relationship to God, union to Christ, leads to communion with God; and communion leads to increased spirituality, and an increase of spirituality leads to consecration.

O, beloved, admire the grace that hath brought you from the dunghill and made you "sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty." Access to God is your privilege; rejoice in it, and often avail yourselves of it. It is the greatest blessing you can enjoy on earth; it is the greatest blessing enjoyed in heaven. Cultivate a grateful, praising spirit, in the remembrance of your

heavenly Father's love and grace in adopting you into his family. Live under his eye—a Father's eye, and in anticipation of your being with him for ever.

We may not confine our thoughts of this distinguished privilege merely to the exercise of prayer; there is often as much nearness to God, in praising God as in praying to him. Of course it will show itself in prayer, in fervent supplication, and in earnest pleading; but there is, I again repeat, as much nearness, perhaps more, in praise as in prayer.

Oh, consider, my brother, what an inestimable privilege it is in the midst of such a world as this; in the midst of its trials, its afflictions, and its manifold temptations. If a man have this—if he have poverty, if he have sorrow upon sorrow, and if visited with the most painful bereavement, yet he has a priceless blessing in having access to God. But if a man have not this, what has he? He may have money, honourable station, endeared connections, and beloved friends,

but if he have not this he has nothing; he has poverty which all the riches of the universe cannot relieve; he has before him tribulation and anguish without mitigation and without limit; he has death without one ray of hope. The holy law of God proclaims him cursed; the holy nature of God is against him. Oh, when we think of the obstacles that are in a worldly man's way to real enjoyment—there is the love of the world, the pleasures of sin, yea, the sinner stands in the way of his own happiness; all that is in him is in his way. How solemn the thought that the sinner has no access to God—to the God that can make rich for time and eternity; the God that can bless him with true and lasting peace; the God that can save him to the uttermost! O, beloved, if there be a forlorn state upon earth, it is that of a soul having no access to God.

Consider what is the *nature* of this access. The Apostle gives to it the characteristic of "*boldness.*" In the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the nineteenth

verse, in the margin this word is translated "liberty." The term includes in it the *right of admission into the presence of God.* This right springs from two considerations—the absolute promise of God, and the infinite worthiness of the Son of God. The true believer in Christ, however feeble his faith, if he is the feeblest that ever lived—yea, supposing him to stand alone as the very weakest in the Lord's family, yet believing on Christ, he has a legal, a covenant right of access to God at *all* times and under *all* circumstances. I do not say he is always living in the sensible enjoyment of it; but he has a legal, a covenanted right to this privilege, of which he may at all times avail himself. Many things will grieve the Holy Spirit; tampering with sin will do it; the light hearing of a sermon may do it; not praying as you hear may do it; neglect of communion with God in secret may do it; too much worldly occupation may do it; yet the right is the same then as before; it is still true that under *all* circumstances the believer in

Jesus has at *all* times a legal, covenanted right of access to God.

Yet the state of mind in the text is far above, far beyond this, there is a *filial* right as well as a *legal* one; every believer is a child; "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." There is no exception. Not one. Now we know that in our own country a nobleman has a right to demand access to the Queen. Who does not know the difference between drawing near as a child to a mother and the right of that nobleman? Yet the words of the text may seem to rise above this. I have no doubt of my being accepted in the "Beloved." I may draw nigh; yet I may feel a shyness, a backwardness, a reserve. Some may be almost disposed to question this, but I am quite sure of it; I have seen it in others, I know somewhat of it in my own soul. But the impression implies the liberty of a child who goes into the presence of his Father at all times, opens his heart, and tells all (this is just what our children ought to do). Access

to God in the enjoyment of this filial right is the highest joy on this side heaven. A legal right is good, it is blessed; a filial right is blessed: but, oh, to live in the hallowed enjoyment of this liberty! When thou canst, my brother, thus in the spirit of adoption—easily find access to God as upon a throne of grace, when, in telling God all thy troubles, thou dost find he can and does stoop low enough to hear thee—that a Father's ear is listening to thy cry, a Father's hand is lifted up to protect thee or to lift thee up, that a Father's heart is yearning over thee—what a balm is there! Seek then to know how he thus careth for thee, and thou shalt then find there is not a trouble that thou canst not look at—there is not a dark path that thou canst not walk in.

A true sense of God as our Father is, at the same time, the most soul-abasing of all principles that can actuate the heart of man. There is nothing in this frame of mind but it has a tendency to subdue pride

in our hearts; it lays us the lowest in the dust while it raises us to the highest enjoyment. In the case of the publican, we have a perfect unfolding of real repentance and true faith, under the legal dispensation. "He stood afar off." The *humiliation* belongs to *all* dispensations; but the standing afar off is quite opposed to the privilege here set forth by the Apostle. I beseech you, my brother, to study and pray over the Thirty-second Psalm. There you will see that the deepest views of sin comport with this holy liberty of drawing near to God.

Observe, too, the Apostle refers to *the state of mind under which believers approach God,* and hold communion with him; he states that believers have access to God with *confidence*—with confidence of being admitted into fellowship with, and of being accepted by him; with confidence of God's love towards us in and through the finished work of Jesus.

And observe, yet further, that access to God is *the common blessing of the whole*

church of God. The Apostle included in it the whole believing family of God then, and it includes the whole family of God now. We who believe are as much interested in the blessing as were the Apostle and the Ephesian believers to whom he wrote. My beloved brother, if the Gospel has been preached effectually to thine heart, there is no difference between thee and this eminent Apostle, and most gifted saint. Many grades there are in the divine life; but, blessed be God! among the saints of God there is a large mass of common property. They have one Father — what a tender tie! They have one Saviour — what an endearing thought! They have one salvation, full and free, and they all want it; they have one fountain, and they all have need to wash in it; they have one righteousness, in which they are all justified; they have one treasury, and they are all invited to receive of its unsearchable riches. And there is one sweet thought, too, they are all going home; but there is one uniting point to all, they

all have access to a throne of grace—to one Father, who is never wearied of them.

Observe, too, that it is by *one and the self-same Spirit* that we have access to God. How much does the Holy and Eternal Spirit stand connected with all prayer! His influences are often felt when not perceived; he is operating when we are in our low frames as when we are experiencing more elevated enjoyments; yea, when we retire with the confession "less than the least of all saints." Be assured, beloved, whatever of real access is enjoyed by thee, and by all the saints of God, it is by the Holy Ghost. Oh then, see, my brother, what a glorious privilege believers were predestinated to. It is to that state in which they shall find the presence of God to be their joy, their delight, their beginning of heaven.

It is thus in due time, the Holy Spirit brings a man to himself; he lays him low and wakes him up from his deadly slumber; this is sometimes done suddenly, more frequently gradually. He sees himself to be a sinner; he flies

to Christ; he believes on him; he obtains a glimpse of the character of God. As his views of God become clearer, his fears subside; his doubts begin to be removed; hope succeeds to despondency, and the blessed Spirit, who was before a convincing, converting, and instructing Spirit, now becomes a comforting Spirit—the Spirit of adoption; and he is enabled to cry, "Abba, Abba, Father!" New habits, new principles, a new state of affection, a new line of conduct are the blessed effects of the Spirit's operation upon the sinner's heart. He who was once afar off is brought nigh, and has access to God.

Observe, moreover, the *channel* through which the blessing flows to us; it issues from God's heart, and flows to us through Jesus Christ. We have "confidence by the faith of him." The work of the Spirit is unutterably blessed; but that is not my way to the Father's love. This is the peculiar glory of Christ. "I am the way." "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." We are brought nigh by the "blood of

Christ." Our right of access to God is in him who is our peace—our Peacemaker; in him who has brought peace into my conscience; in him who has reconciled my soul to God, and who has reconciled every divine perfection to me.

Consider the blessed *effects and consequences* of this faith in Christ. There is no barrier between the believer's faith and his God. There is now no condemnation, no felt displeasure—but acceptance in the Beloved, access to God; the holy liberty of walking with God, of serving and glorifying God. It was before their covenant right; now, according to the measure and degree of their faith, it is theirs in actual and real possession. Many of God's dear children are putting the work of the Spirit before the work of Christ. If God gives you, my brother, to enjoy real delight in prayer, in meditation, how often comes to thee the temptation to forget that you are after all nothing but a poor, needy, helpless, ill-deserving, and hell-deserving sinner!

If, in ourselves, we had "confidence" in approaching God, it would be a pharisaic confidence. If it were in ourselves we had "boldness," it would be a ruffian boldness; but, if it be in Christ, it at once assumes another and a more delightful aspect. Christ has removed all that barred our way to the Father; he has taken it all entirely and for ever away. And when we draw near to God in his name, it is as if Christ himself were there. The great pledge of peace is at God's right hand, and it is as if his church is there, because he is there. God beholds them in him; God blesses them in him. Who presents them to the Father? Christ himself. Taking them by the hand—that is the meaning of the passage—he introduces them into the presence of God. "This," he says, "is your God and my God;" "your Father and my Father."

Oh, let me yet once more, my brother, direct your attention to the spirit of child-like confidence, which you should cherish

in all your approaches to your heavenly Father. There are some Christians, weak believers are they, who seem as if they thought that God was pleased when they come before him as with chains. Some speak as if their lives had been spared one day longer, as a criminal under sentence of death might do; others speak of being tied and bound by the chain of their sins; yet it is as children, not as criminals—it is as free born, not as slaves—that we are invited to draw near to God. "Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say his flesh; and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." It is as accepted in the Beloved, as his adopted children, we are to draw near to God. We ask not the clemency of a judge, but we ask a Father for

forgiveness. Never forget that this is thy privilege—to have access to God. Remember, that when thou dost ask for more grace, more humility, more tenderness, more zeal, more love, these things are pleasing in his sight; and that he is more ready to give them than thou art to ask or to receive them at his hands.

Observe, this privilege is enjoyed *through faith* in Christ. Faith looks to his blood—faith rests in his atonement—makes mention of his righteousness—looks off itself to Christ. It is thus, beloved, we exalt the Lord Jesus. Let us feel thankful that our access to God is by faith; if we were left to our own judgment, to our own feelings, all would be lost; but the ground of our right of access to God being in Christ, all is safe.

Now I would say, if this be the great blessing of the Gospel, if it be heaven's chiefest mercy, if it be the peculiar privilege of the believer—seek it. You may pray, and not have it; you may praise, and not have it; you may hear sermons, and not

have it; you may write letters on religious subjects, and not have it. Never be satisfied, my brother, without realizing, day by day, what it is to have fellowship with God through his Son Jesus Christ. It will be a cordial to thy weary soul. It is one thing to use the means, and another to find God in them. It were no small mercy if, in every means, you were but to say—I see God therein. Many run to hear sermons—do you be more concerned to see God in the sanctuary; many read the Word as a commanded duty—oh! be it your desire to find God in it. The worldly man may deride this privilege — many professors may call it enthusiasm; but the true-hearted believer will realize in it a foretaste of heaven. Which is right? Poor thoughtless, Christless soul, dost thou call this fancy? Where then is *your* substance? *We* have it in the manifestation of God to our souls. Oh! then, seek it for yourselves; it can satisfy your most enlarged desires; it will pacify your troubled spirit, it will sanctify your depraved hearts. Not only seek access

in all the means, but seek to realize this highest access, even access to God through his Son Jesus Christ.

I know that legal access is a blessing; I know that filial access is a greater blessing; but to realize our adoption, to know our election of God, is the highest of all blessings—it is the sheet anchor of our souls. The filial right is like having the haven of glory right in view—but this state of confidence is like entering the haven in full sail. Oh! then seek it *diligently*—seek it *unhesitatingly*—seek it *perseveringly*, but seek it just as the man who would not take any denial sought it. "I come," said he, "not for comfort; I come for bread, and bread I must have"—and he had it.

If there be anything that stands in the way of our enjoying the blessing, oh, let us be willing to part with it. What is it? Art thou, my brother, willing to say with David: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and

lead me in the way everlasting." Whatever hinders this confidence, ask God to give thee grace to lay it down at the foot of the cross.

Ever keep in thy memory the channel through which the privilege comes. How many are perpetually looking into themselves for comfort and for hope! They make no advance in a knowledge and enjoyment of the things of God, and no wonder. What is the remedy? It is in having filial access to God. When we are led to approach God as a loving Father, in and through the mediation of his Son, we soon find the difference between looking at our wounds and looking at the remedy. Read and pray over that Scripture in the First Epistle of John, the fourth chapter, and fourteenth and sixteenth verses. Now whence was the Apostle and those whom he included in that Scripture, brought to know the love that God had towards them? It was because their eye was directed to Christ. "For," says the Apostle, "we have seen and do testify that the Father

sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world."

One more word let me add; if God gives you to enjoy the privilege, take care how you lose it; *it* may be lost, though your soul shall not be lost. The Holy Spirit may be very easily grieved. Beware of first declensions, worldly contaminations, spiritual sloth, forgetfully passing over secret transactions in your spirits with the God of spirits. If you obtain this mercy, *use* it. Draw near to your heavenly Father at all times and under all circumstances; draw so near to him that you may hear the whispers of his love—the whispers of his rebuke. No one may have found fault with thee, the saints may even commend thee, but there may be the secret whisper within of talents neglected, little largeness of heart towards the one family. Go to the throne of grace, and confess all this to Him.

O beloved! see what debtors we are to God's sovereign grace. What was the previous condition of these Ephesian Chris-

tians—what was ours? "Without God," "having no hope." But, like them, we have obtained mercy, and are now brought to praise him for his electing love!—

"Pause, my soul, adore and wonder;—
Ask, oh, why such love to me?
Grace hath put me in the number
Of the Saviour's family.
Lord, I thank thee,
For thy grace so rich and free."

VI.

The Bond of Brotherhood.

"Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."—EPHESIANS iii. 13.

It is a tender tie that binds the family of God together. The world cannot understand the secret principle that thus unites them. It was once a proverb, "See how these Christians love each other." Would that now the world could see more of this brotherly love and union among the members of the same family. Still, however, there is sufficient of this principle in operation to excite the inquiries of worldly people concerning the causes and grounds of this union. Some there are who attribute this to unity of sentiment; yet how varied

are the sentiments of the people of God. Often it is ascribed to love of party; but though there is but one church, into how many sections is it divided and subdivided! Others attribute it to frequent and familiar intercourse; but how seldom do they have this close fellowship with each other, or even to see each other frequently. The fact is, the world is not prepared to understand the blessedness of the tie which binds the hearts of the Lord's family in Christian love. They all love Christ, *that* is the secret of their union; and for want of sympathy the world is entirely ignorant of the matter.

Believers in Jesus are all redeemed by precious blood—are all called by sovereign grace—are all sanctified by the same blessed Spirit. There is a community of need that unites them; what one needs the others need. There is a community of experience that unites them; the broken heart, the tender conscience, the eye that looks to Jesus, the realizing acceptance in the Son of God, the blood sprinkled on the heart.

There is a community of dependence that unites them, for they all hang weak and helpless on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a community of interest in the Saviour's love and grace that unites them; he is the vine, they are the branches, and the weakest branch is as firmly united to the stem as the strongest. There is a community of desire that unites them, for all the saints of God long to be holy, all of them hunger and thirst after righteousness; and then there is a community of prospect that unites them; for they will soon be in heaven, they will see Jesus, they will be with him, they will be like him, the weakest as well as the strongest.

They are all fellow-soldiers, forming the army of the living God; they are all sailors, doing business in the deep waters, and are steering their bark through rocks and quicksands, amidst rough and stormy seas, to the haven of rest on the eternal shores; they are all pilgrims and sojourners in a strange world; here they "have no continuing city, but they seek a better country, even a heavenly."

They are all fellow-servants in the employ of the King of kings and Lord of lords, and they will soon shine as a glorious constellation in the firmament of glory. They are children of one family; God is their Father, and Jesus is their Elder Brother. Tender as the tie is that binds us to another by nature's links, this is a higher tie, a tie that shall never be sundered—it shall last as long as God himself shall last.

Such was the tie that existed between these Ephesians and this man of God; but there was a still more affecting bond of union subsisting between them than we have yet noticed. He was their shepherd—their spiritual guide, whose concern for their souls' welfare was incessant and intense. For three years, he told them, he had not ceased to warn every one of them night and day with tears—no wonder they greatly longed after him. He was their spiritual father, that was an additional tie. His conduct towards them was not only characterized by all the gentleness of a tender nurse—but with all

the love and pity of an affectionate father. "I write not these things," says he to the Corinthians, "to shame you, but as my beloved sons, to warn you." "Though," he adds, "ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me."

But there was one tie still beyond that. He was at that time a sufferer; he was in great peril, and experiencing manifold tribulations on their account. If we refer to a few passages in his several letters to the churches, we shall see how he had this gift bestowed upon him: "Unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake." In the first chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians he speaks of his bonds in Christ and for Christ. He tells the Colossians that though he was then expecting death that he rejoiced in his sufferings for them, and in "the afflictions of Christ

in his flesh for his body's sake, which is the church"; and to the Thessalonians, he speaks of his afflictions and of his being appointed thereunto. If, however, we turn to his First Epistle to the Corinthians, we shall find him speaking of himself as being made "a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." "Even unto the present hour," he says, "we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our hands;" "being defamed" and made as the "filth of the earth," and regarded as the "offscouring of all things." In these and other instances, behold what the sufferings of this man of God were. We might suppose that while the members of the Church at Ephesus were reading this letter, or hearing it read, they would think that he was then in immediate danger of dying a violent death, and that they should see his face no more. Thus the strongest of all possible ties consisted in the fact, as he here tells them, that all these sufferings, tribulations, and

exposedness to death were on their account, "In my tribulations *for you.*" How must this have increased their sorrow and deepened their woe!

The word "wherefore" connects this passage with the previous verses. Since ye have been made acquainted with the distinguished grace bestowed upon me, that I should preach among you Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, seeing that the high and holy mystery which has been hid for ages is now made known unto you, so that Jew and Gentile are now fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of Christ by the Gospel; and since of this Gospel I am made a minister, and that not only to you Ephesian Gentiles, but "to make all men see what is the fellowship of this mystery"; and seeing that all this is the fulfilment of God's "eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," by whom you, as well as the Jew, have liberty of "access by one Spirit unto the Father," since these things are so, I desire that ye faint not at any

tribulations which I am called upon to suffer on behalf of this Gospel for your sakes.

The term "desire," as here employed, means to beseech, to implore, to intreat; that "ye faint not," implies, lest in the tenderness of their grief, and the deep solicitude they felt for his safety, they should be overmuch discouraged and cast down in their minds.

Oh! what a bond of sympathy is the tie of common trial. It is the tie of suffering membership; and this is the tenderest of all ties. We know that sympathy may sometimes sleep in the same body; but let any part of the body suffer, let there be racking pain in one of its members, and then every other member is by sympathy affected. Tender is the tie that binds a father to his son, but the parent may cause his child to be stirred up to anger; tender is the tie that binds a mother to her sucking child, yet she *may* forget it; tenderer still is the tie that binds the husband to the wife, yet the husband may not be always equally kind; but the

pained limb claims the sympathy of all the members by night and by day, every hour, every moment it calls forth, and produces, too, the sympathy of the whole body. And this it is that gives us the tenderest view of that tie which binds the family of God together.

But let us now endeavour to ascertain in what respect *the Apostle's tribulations for them could be for their glory?* It is as much as if he had said, Ye were once Gentiles—"enemies to God by wicked works," "children of wrath," "having no hope," and "without God in the world." But mark God's peculiar mercy to you; see his sovereign electing love displayed on your behalf. "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins," hath sent the Gospel to you, and sent me his minister, me his Apostle, me his imprisoned Apostle, and that for your sakes; that you might be partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel. It is as if he had said, O, ye Ephe-

sians, lose sight of me in the view of the sovereign grace of God that sent me. The streams are sweet, but if our hearts are deeply imbued with the truth, we shall say, the source is far sweeter than the stream. Look, my brother, at the mercies bestowed upon you, but forget not the channel through which they came; and you, too, like the Apostle, will thus be tracing them back to the source of all blessedness.

But the Apostle, by the expression "for your glory," also reminded them of the *hope set before them*, of which blessed hope they had become partakers by that Gospel which they had received. What is glory, if it is not that — the Gospel and the reception of that Gospel into the heart? What a miserable condition is it for a man to be destitute of a solid, scriptural hope, founded on, "Thus saith the Lord." We have already seen, in our meditation on the preceding verse, what a glory it is for us to feel that we have a legal right to draw near to the Lord; and how much more glorious

it is if we can thus draw near to God with confidence. And if we are not able to reach so high, yet we may have a well-grounded hope that we are accepted in Christ; and feel a comfortable assurance of mind that we have not only fled to him for refuge, but have found in him a "hiding-place from the storm, a covert from the tempest, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land;" that we have gone to him in our need, and found in him a brother born for adversity—yea, "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Thus stripped of our self-righteousness and self-confidence, how blessed it is to have confidence in the righteousness of Jesus! In saying his tribulations were for their glory, it is as much as if the Apostle had said, "Though *I* am a prisoner, *you* are free; though my heart is often wounded, you have, in the Gospel I have preached unto you, a cordial for every drooping hour."

There is another view in which Paul's tribulations were for their glory; he considered—he had a right to consider—that

they would *issue in their deeper sanctification.* Oh, how little are we aware what a power of influence there is in a holy example! I believe it to be the great instrument by which the Lord often works upon the hearts of men. Oh, to see a man acting out his principles in his business, acting out the Gospel in his profession, what a power there is in it!

We have also in these words *a beautiful exhibition of the Apostle's character and conduct.* What unshaken stedfastness is here developed. We are apt to imagine, as we have in another place observed, that the Apostles were not "men of like passions with ourselves," as they themselves affirm. We seem to expect, as a matter of course, that they would be unflinching in their testimony before the world; but there were times, as we have seen, when even Paul was made to weep bitter tears. We might have supposed that he would have said, "I am myself almost ready to faint under these tribulations;" but

while not a syllable nor a sigh of regret escaped him, his soul was often filled with joy in the prospect of suffering for Christ's sake.

There is another feature in this sympathy of love, as manifested by the Apostle, which we may notice—that is, *its disinterestedness.* One sometimes sees so much selfishness—in whom? In the saints of God. Alas! it is so sometimes, and but too frequent. The world, in general, is made up of selfishness. It is, however, of want of sympathy manifested by the professed followers of Christ the Apostle complains when he tells the Philippians, "I have no man like minded, who will naturally care for your state; for all seek their own and not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Self in the Apostle seemed to have been annihilated. I do not say that it was absolutely, I do not believe that it was; but he seemed to think of nothing but these Ephesians and their welfare.

There was also *great tenderness of heart evinced* by this eminent Apostle; we can sometimes see great boldness, great disinte-

restedness in the children of God; we sometimes see both united in one person; and yet there is often a great lack of tenderness of spirit. In the Apostle we see something of the character of his Divine Master—the qualities of the lion and the lamb blended. It was this that induced him to say, "Do not faint on my account; do not even think of my tribulations, but think of your glory."

We may here just observe, that the *profession of the Gospel is always more or less connected with tribulation.* Our chief danger is on the side of worldly principles. This I know is a delicate subject, but I have yet to learn that a man can go through the world, exhibiting true Christian principles, without meeting with a cross. The Gospel, nevertheless, is worthy of any sacrifice, however great, which you may be called to experience in the way of a honest profession of it. Think of its benevolent aspect to man; it is a Gospel that can come to a sinner, however vile, and say, There is a "fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness;" whosoever will

may wash therein, and be clean. It is the Gospel only that can make a miserable sinner happy; it draws us nearer to God, and makes our very sufferings minister to the health and safety of our souls.

Observe also, that *in all sufferings endured for Christ's sake there are immense blessings to be realized.* We say all this grace in his heart, and on his lips, all this boldness of character, was in the Apostle; and so it is in reality in every child of God. But what drew it out? It was in the way of endurance; it was thus also that the graces of these Ephesians were drawn forth into active and beneficent exercise.

What a holy, active sympathy existed in both the Apostle and the saints to whom he wrote! There ought not to be the mere courtesies of the world among the saints of God; though, indeed, they are commanded to be courteous. Be careful, beloved brethren, to cultivate in your intercourse with the people of God, that warm sympathy, that tenderness of heart, that the Apostle exhibited.

From the solicitude here manifested by the Apostle, it is evident that *a faint heart is not in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel.* We need not only to be cautioned against lightness of feeling and of carriage, but against a fainting spirit. There is much unbelief in our fainting—looking more at the misery than at God's mercy, more at the trouble than at God's strength to support us under it; looking more at the difficulties than at the promises, more at what we are than what God is. Whence is it, beloved, there is so much casting down of spirit — so much despondency? Does not despondency lead to departure from the Lord? And does not one departure lead to another departure, and a still further going away from God? Oh, guard against besetting sins—a worldly spirit, and an unwatchful, prayerless frame of mind! It is the want of this holy watching and seeking, and neglect of studying the page of conscience, that oftentimes weakens our strength.

It is a great and blessed thing, in fainting moments, when our spirits sink, to meditate upon the distinguishing mercies to which the Apostle directed the attention of these Ephesian believers. Oh, this electing love, this redeeming blood, this preserving power, this restoring grace! If we oftener laid these upon our hearts by prayerful meditation, I believe it would be one great means whereby our spirits would be revived, and our hearts become more devoted to God. Oh, my poor fainting brother, if thou didst but seek more to realize the power and preciousness of Christ's love to thee, to meditate more frequently and prayerfully on the glory of his person, the completeness of his atonement, the perfection of his righteousness, the depth of his sympathy, the fulness of his grace, and the stability of the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, thou wouldst find how true and blessed is that declaration that he "giveth power to the faint," and "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." O beloved! thou shalt thus in-

deed find that thy sorrows and tribulations stir up the very heart of God on your behalf. Ah! who can tell the love he has towards thee. He who sees Jesus in his suffering saints, regards thy person, thy necessities, thy cries, and the longing of thy soul as dear to him. "Despise not thou, therefore, the chastening of the Lord, neither faint when thou art rebuked of him."

VII.

The Fellowship of Prayer.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."—EPHES. iii. 14.

THE religion of the Gospel is from above; it is from God, and it is like God. Not only is it holy and spiritual, but it is benevolent and diffusive. The moon is an emblem of the Church; she receives her light from the sun, and she diffuses all the light that she receives. No one can look on the surface of God's creation but he must see this truth in all its bearings; no one can look on the earth, on the ground, on the grass, but he must see the unselfish principles of the God that created them. So

whether I look at God's creation, or the displays of God's providence, or at the operations of God's grace, there is in all the principle of diffusion. You have received—diffuse. You have received that you may diffuse; diffuse therefore, because God—your God—is diffusive in all his works. It was this principle by which the Apostle himself was influenced. What real love was exhibited by him in the whole of his conduct! He had preached the Gospel to these Gentiles, and that at the hazard of his life; for their sakes he had been imprisoned, and at the time he was writing this letter to them he was a prisoner; and now, as a suppliant in his imprisonment, he bends the knee at the footstool of mercy, and implores God in their behalf. O beloved! we see in him what we ought to be and to do, and what are our great deficiencies.

With regard to the *posture;* it is of but little importance what the believer's attitude is in prayer, except as it indicates the state of his mind. We find that David sat in holy

worship; this might have been through weariness of body occasioned by the length of time occupied in these devotional exercises. This, however, seems a solitary instance, as we have only the account of its occurring once. Many have sat and prayed; many have poured out their hearts in prayer while upon their beds; many have prayed while they have been walking in the public streets, or when engaged in the transaction of their secular affairs. But in neither instance would this be considered the posture of prayer. We find in the Old Testament, that sometimes the worshippers knelt, and sometimes they stood; but in the New Testament we find *no* instance of *sitting* in prayer. The publican stood. When the Apostle bid farewell to the elders of this very Church, as recorded in the twentieth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, it is said, "he kneeled down and prayed with them all;" and here is the same posture adopted—that of bending the knee before God.

We are also in this passage reminded of *the proper object of prayer.* Paul prayed to "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" — he here gives us the tenderest view of God's character. How it reminds one of the relation in which believers stand to the God of all grace! The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is also our God and Father, as Christ told his disciples: "I ascend unto my Father, and to your Father, to my God, and to your God." In the covenant of grace the Father takes a prominent position; for if we study the Scriptures of truth, we shall find that the Son is his Servant, and so also the Spirit is set forth as not speaking of himself; though the Son thought it not robbery to be equal with God, and the Spirit is equal with respect to the Godhead—co-equal, co-eternal.

And we are here also informed of the *persons* on whose behalf the Apostle thus devoutly and affectionately prayed; it was for the "saints which are at Ephesus," and for all the "faithful in Christ Jesus."

When the penitent believing soul is intro-

duced into the kingdom of Christ—the kingdom of righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost, it feels itself to be in a new world. There are new trials, new difficulties, new temptations, new dangers; but there are also new privileges, unutterable privileges. He has given up the shadow for the substance, the show for the reality, the tinsel for the silver, and the glitter for the gold. He leaves many of his former acquaintances, and he now becomes acquainted with God. He is forsaken by many of his former friends; but he now finds those to be his friends who are the friends of God. He has lost much of the sympathy, it may be, of those who were once his friends, and he has now (and according to the measure of his faith he feels it) the sympathy of Jesus. He has now made this blessed exchange. How the Apostle felt it to be so when he "counted all things but loss, and dross, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord!"

And he has another blessing too, with

which he becomes acquainted, and that is the sympathy of God's children. It is true, our great inheritance is the sympathy of Christ, and his intercession. We have seen Abraham to fail in his intercession, but when did ever the intercession of the Son of God fail? But for that intercession, you and I, my brother, were at this moment without one hope; notwithstanding our faith; notwithstanding our possessing the new principle—the Divine nature, it would have all been swept away just like chaff before the wind. And yet, beloved, we are not to undervalue the intercessions, the prayers, and the sympathies of the children of God.

When the believer is introduced into this new kingdom, he not only finds new privileges, but he finds new obligations spring up. Just as when a stranger is introduced into a family of which before he knew nothing, now the members of that family stand in a new relation to him, and all that he can do for their good he is disposed to do; so with the privilege, obligation springs up

they always come together. Our very obligations are privileges; and it is no small thing to the believer, in the loss of the dearest earthly friend he has, if he has the sympathy, the love, and the prayers of God's praying people. If we have these, then, we have the heart of Jesus, the promises too of Jesus on our side; for this is one of the channels by which God conveys a blessing to his saints in this vale of tears.

When we say that the Apostle prayed for the saints, and that in this respect we are to imitate him, we do not mean—he did not—that we are not to pray for others. Not pray for those who are "without hope!"—we might say, "God forbid!" for you and I were "without hope" once. We find clear testimony of Scripture on this point in the second chapter of the First Epistle to Timothy, and first verse: "I exhort, therefore, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men: for kings"—whether they be infidel kings, or heathen kings, or abominable kings, who-

ever they may be—"for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved"—that is, some of all men, of all ranks, of all circumstances, of all conditions of life—"who will have all," or some of all, "to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth." Therefore, we are to pray "for *all* men."

We are commanded to "love our neighbour as ourselves." I am sure there is no proof of our love for our neighbour if we do not pray for him. How few are there who can do any substantial good to their neighbours!—you that can do it, remember your obligations; but how do you "love your neighbour as yourselves" if you do not pray for your neighbour? And if you ask, How is this love to show itself? our Lord tells us: we are to "pray for them that persecute us"—"love ye your enemies, and pray for them that despitefully

use you." This is how we are to show our love. It is not in mere kind words, kind greetings, kind expressions; they are very easy, they cost us but little; but, oh, to *pray* for them! If you open your purse to your neighbours, it costs you something; but when you go to God in the spirit of prayer, you open oftentimes the very treasury of God for them. How many will have to say in eternity, "It was the effect of your prayers! It was according to God's eternal purpose, his unchangeable decree, undoubtedly; but his ear was prepared to hear, therefore he prepared your heart to ask."

O beloved! if you and I are to pray only for the saints, what an error poor Moses was in! Look into the fourteenth chapter of Numbers, and see how unselfish he was—(from the eleventh to the nineteenth verse). The Lord had said in the eleventh verse—"I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they."

Moses had his personal friends, he had his relatives, he had his brethren; yet he prayed for them, the whole of his prayer is for them, and he prayed pleading with God his great and wondrous perfections—"The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy." Oh, when have we had so much grace in circumstances of great trouble, as that our hearts were drawn out in fervent supplication for those around us? Observe, too, how Samuel reasoned. It is in the twelfth chapter of the First Book of Samuel, and twenty-third verse—"Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." How have you and I, my brother, sinned, then, against him? I believe that whatever spiritual blessing we want, whatever we long for,

whatever we seek in prayer, it is owing to the descending power of the Spirit. We are first of all sensible that we do want it, and we are never so sensible that we want it, as when we are led on our knees to pray earnestly to God, preparatory to our receiving it. A man may be very fervent in praying for himself; he may be fervent in praying for his own soul, but he will sin against God if he does not pray for those around him. Shall we turn to some higher exhibition of this? Look at the Apostle, in the ninth chapter of Romans—"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart; for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Never can I believe that the Apostle could ever for one moment give up the prospect of eternal glory, or lose the Divine presence for any child of man; but, beloved, he is here led to show the intensity

of his love; he was willing to forfeit all his privileges, to be separated even from the children of God as to privileges, as one cast out, for the sake of, his "brethren" and "kinsmen" according to the flesh." Remember the twelfth chapter too—"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

Beloved, we see clearly enough, then, that the saints of God are not merely to pray for the saints, but they are to pray for those around them. Oh, I would say, look around you; you will see many causes for praying for poor sinners; you will see ample cause on all sides to be urgent with God for them. Look at our country, look at our present position, look at our nation, look at our churches. I would say look out of ourselves, for the saints of God are not only to pray for the saints, but to pray for those who are ready to perish for lack of knowledge. We can rejoice in the covenant "ordered in all things and sure;" we can rejoice that God will not lose one of his, but will "accom-

plish the number of his elect," when he shall come in his glory and in his kingdom; but that should never hinder us, no, not for one moment, from pleading hard at the throne of grace, that he would put forth his mighty power in the hearts of these poor, desolate—ah! desolate sinners; desolate, for there are many without God, without Christ, and they go to rest at night in that state with no thought or concern about the salvation of their precious never dying souls.

But it is the saints of God that here were the especial subjects of the Apostle's prayer; it is the saints of God for whom we are especially to pray. Ah! these saints of God—they are those who bear his image, chosen before all worlds, redeemed by the precious blood of an incarnate God, "called out of darkness into marvellous light;" those who fear God, those who love him because "he first loved us;" of whom it is said, "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature." Oh, if, my poor, prayerless brother, thou art dreaming of the promises, and

yet knowest nothing of the converting power of the Spirit, beware; thou art walking on worse than the edge of the volcano; it is but a little moment and destruction will be thy portion, for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." But these have received the wondrous change, they "have passed from death unto life;" they "were darkness, now are they light in the Lord;" and they are made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Yet, notwithstanding all this, they are poor, imperfect creatures. In their faith, in their hope, in their love they are imperfect; they are imperfect in everything. Even the Apostle Paul felt this, though he had been "caught up to the third heaven"—"we know in part;" and if he said so, well may we say so. Look at any one truth—look at the incarnation—look at the glorious righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ—look at the atonement—look at the "covenant ordered in all things and sure;" look at any one of these—how little do we

know of them! Surely, we seem to stand on the threshhold of truth, rather than to enter into the length and breadth of it. We know indeed but in part. Look again at that great man of God, the Apostle Paul; he sometimes trembled: "I was with you in weakness, and fear, and in much trembling." And an especial message was sent to him, saying, "Fear not, Paul." He, as we have already noticed, had his weaknesses and his faintnesses, too. And remark too, lest the heart of Paul should be cast down, Titus was sent to comfort him—"God that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." If I see him disputing with Barnabas, was there not a deficiency of love? was there not a deficiency of patience? It is, therefore, for the saints of God, though they be imperfect, and because they are imperfect—it is for them that we are to pray.

These epistles were sent to the saints of God; not to national saints,—they would not understand them; but to the true saints

of God. It was to those who had been called by sovereign grace out of nature's kingdom into the kingdom of grace. And how this ought to weigh on the hearts of many! Put this Epistle to the Ephesians into the hands of these national saints, and ninety-nine out of a hundred of them will not understand it. And I would say, and I would say it with humility and meekness, when this epistle was put into the hands of the saints of God composing this church at Ephesus, that if ninety-nine out of a hundred of them did not understand it, it would be to me one of the greatest wonders. I do not say they would understand the whole of it, for who is he that does?—but they would have a true, and spiritual perception of what the reality of this epistle is, and of the truths contained in it.

It is the saints of God for whom we are to pray; however feeble the impression of Christ's image on them may be, however weak, however little, however small their faith, yet if they love him, we should love

them and pray for them. Therefore, when you read in the sixth chapter and the eighteenth verse, the expression "for all saints," remark, that it takes in not only some, but *all;* not merely some of them who are the nearest to us, the dearest to us, and the closest to us; not merely those whom we think the most conscientious and the most devoted, the most spiritual and the most holy; but also those in whom we see great blemishes. If we do but perceive in them the handwriting of God; if we do but perceive in them the broad mark; if they love Christ, and hate sin; however confused their minds, however at times we may find them drooping on their way, then the Lord enjoins us to pray for them. There is a tender tie that binds us together, and we should show the reality of it by our supplication on their behalf.

We have here *a clear token of what is our duty* considering we are "members of one body." Observe how that is set forth in the fourth chapter and the sixteenth verse: "From whom the whole body fitly

joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." The weakest member has as much interest in the body as the strongest; and if the least member suffers, the whole body suffers. So wherever we see the true marks of membership, whether they may be near or distant, however that may be, we are to pray for them, and to pray earnestly for them.

Ah! beloved, did we but feel the close and tender tie—did we more enter into that great truth, "Why, the same love that loves them loves me!" God knows no difference in his love; there is as much done for the weakest as for the strongest; it cost the incarnate God his blood to redeem their souls from eternal wrath; each one of God's saints is a temple of the Holy Ghost; there is the same breastplate for the weakest as for the strongest; they are all borne on the shoulders, and they are all borne on the

heart of the High Priest. The very sameness of the desert too through which we are passing, the sameness of our enemies, the sameness of our friends, the sameness of our consolation, the sameness of our prospects, the sameness of our election, ought to endear us one towards another, and ought to draw us all out in love and prayer the one for the other.

So, beloved, the very gifts and the very grace that I see in my brother ought to endear him to me; the very trials that we have in common with each other to pass through ought to endear him to me. And if God has straitened his path; if I see him in sorrow, if I see him in grief, ought it not to endear him to me, and make me to sympathize with him and more earnestly to beseech God for him? Nay, I will go one step further and say, that whatever blemishes and infirmities I see in him ought to increase my love and sympathy for him, and I ought to bear his infirmity on my heart at a throne of grace. Whatever there is that grieves me

in his inconsistency that I see, ought to lead me more to a throne of grace for his inconsistency's sake. Oh! did we enter into this great truth—did we feel more of it! I believe that there never was a more searching truth to men's consciences than this, when God the Spirit makes it so; I believe it will search us and make us to know what poor and feeble Christians we are half our days.

There is a selfishness in praying for ourselves, naturally and necessarily (I do not say it is a sinful selfishness, but a natural selfishness that is bound up in our prayers) —so that when we pray for more spirituality, more deadness to the world, for more of the quickening of the Spirit of God within us, when we pray for more close and real walking with God, there is a tendency to help ourselves in all these things; but when we pray for a brother, when we are urgent with God for his spirituality, when we lie low in the dust because of some fault that we see in him, when we pray for more unearthliness in him,

when we pray that he may be more weaned from the creature, when we pray that he may be more a man of God in all the actings of spiritual life, there is nothing selfish in it.

And this fellowship of prayer is especially necessary, in seasons like ours, when there is a great deal to try the saints of God. There are a great many heresies, there are a great many schisms and divisions, there are a great many blemishes, to be seen amongst the saints of God. Oh, beloved, in the midst of all this to love the saints of God, and pray for them! There are some to whom we naturally addict ourselves, there is something in them intellectually and morally that pleases us; there is something in their doings or in their habits that pleases us; but sometimes it is that all these things are otherwise, and we see nothing at all in them to please us but the image of Christ, and nothing to draw us towards them, but his mark on their foreheads: they love Christ, and they hate sin. Now, in the absence of those

things, to pray earnestly, to pray affectionately, and to pray perseveringly for them, beloved, requires great grace. There are some whom it costs little to love; they are so lovely, there is something that so commands our attention, that we cannot be with them but we are drawn to them: so there are some, in whom there is something that so repels and removes them from us, that to love them for Christ's sake, and to be urgent and prayerful in spirit for them, requires great grace. Oh, it should lead us to great searching of heart; it should lead us to great pursuing of principles to their sources, and that constantly, day by day!

In conclusion, observe of *what vast moment it is that our saintship should be clear.* Oh, that you, my brother, may have the clear inward testimony of your saintship! for men must know us to be saints of God before they can be urgent in prayer for us. I may see ten thousand imperfections; I may see them to be weak, in some things very weak; but I must see the clear lineaments

of the Holy Ghost, the clear drawing of the power of the Spirit—I must see the clear mark in their forehead before ever I can be led out fervently to pray for them as children of the one family. Oh! then see, my brother, the necessity for having a clear, manifest decisive evidence of your saintship!

Ah! beloved, little do we know how others need our prayers. We see them smiling—no wrinkle on their brow; they are enabled to pierce through the cloud; but it costs them many inward pangs—they sigh, and sometimes they cry; it is a hard struggle they maintain: we just look at the outside, we see nothing more. Ah! could they tell us half of what they have been the subjects of—in faintings, in depressions, in their nervousness, their sad views of themselves, their darkness, their legality!—though we see it not, how would our prayerful sympathies be called forth.

Oh! how little can we enter into what the saints of God really are, so as faithfully and earnestly to pray for them. We cannot

enter into all their cases; we are not commanded to do it; but still to remember that they are tempted souls, that they are tried souls! The index of a man's heart is not always discovered in his countenance; there are many aching hearts hid under a smiling face. One little knows, beloved, how much the saints of God are tried, and how they stand in need of our supplications at a throne of grace continually.

We little know how soon, on these accounts, *we ourselves may need the prayers of our brethren;* for where we think ourselves the strongest, we may find ourselves to be the weakest; and where others give us the most credit, there we may have the lowest place. Even the Apostle Paul, as we have already noticed, who wrote a letter to comfort Titus, was himself comforted by Titus; as he saith, "God, who comforteth the hearts of them that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." So, though we may be the means of comfort to others at one period, they may be the means of comfort

to us at another; and even the younger ones may comfort the older, and the weaker ones may comfort the stronger. Therefore let us be urgent in prayer; for we little know how we may need the prayers of others, as we little know how others may need our prayers.

But, beloved, there is another point, and that is, *there is a peculiar blessing connected with intercessory prayer.* There is a very strong expression in the Second Epistle to Timothy, the first chapter, the third verse: "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day." What a strong expression—"I thank God that he has given me a praying spirit for thee." What is there in a praying spirit for another that should call forth gratitude and thankfulness in me? O beloved! to be the means of binding up one broken heart; to be the means of leading onward one troubled heart; to be the means of pouring the wine and oil into some fainting

spirit; to be the means of cheering the weakest soul! The Lord can make use of the feeblest means, and the most unlikely means, to draw forth the saints of God to more fervency, more decision, more glorious conquests over self and sin. Oh! I would say there is a blessing connected with it. There was indeed cause for Paul's thankfulness that he continued in remembrance of his beloved Timothy in his prayers night and day; and you and I never have so great cause for thankfulness as when we are so led out in prayer for others; when we are led to "mourn with those that mourn, and rejoice with those that do rejoice;" to be thankful for that dear brother, to be urgent with God on his behalf; to look on that dear sister, and be deeply humbled before God on her account—when our hearts are drawn forth thus in the exercise of prayer for them, I would say, there is no greater proof on earth that we are children of God than when we are so favoured of God. "We know," says the Apostle John, "that we have passe

from death unto life because we love the brethren:"—

"My soul shall pray for Zion still,
While life or breath remains;
There my best friends and kindred dwell,
There God my Saviour reigns."

VIII.

The Family Name.

"Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."—EPHES. iii. 15.

THESE Ephesian saints, for whose welfare the Apostle thus manifests a prayerful solicitude, had been chosen by the God and Father of their Lord, and adopted into his family by their union with his dear Son, Jesus Christ; of which exalted and holy privilege he, in the former part of this epistle, most affectionately and faithfully reminded them. Into this full and blessed relation they had been actually brought by the regenerating and sanctifying grace of the Holy Ghost.

Observe the *extent* of the family. This family, in the eye of God, takes in the whole election of grace; those who are now in heaven, and those who are now upon earth; those who are living in the world, yet uncalled, and those who are yet unborn. There is a sense in which angels may also be considered as forming a part of this family. To these glorious beings, I think, the Apostle in the first chapter of this epistle, the tenth verse, thus refers: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." Therefore I think angels cannot be excluded. But in the verse on which we are now meditating, saints are regarded as the children of God in a higher and more glorious sense than the angels themselves, who are called the sons of God; for high, holy, and exalted as their nature is, the only sense, as far as we know, in which angels are the sons of God, is by their creation.

But believers are the sons of God by being adopted into that family of which the Lord Jesus is the Great Head, the "everlasting Father,"—the Head and Father of a spiritual seed. He "shall see his seed"—a seed as numerous as drops of morning dew, or as the sands upon the sea-shore, countless as the stars of heaven, constituting "that number which no man could number;" for whom as their Head and Representative he engaged in everlasting covenant to take into union with his divinity their very nature, to become incarnate—"forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same"—that, as man, he might live for them, and as man might die for them, as man might plead for them, and as man might stand in their stead at the right hand of God, bearing their names before the throne of God as if they themselves were already there; as man he sprinkles his own blood upon the Mercy-seat, perpetually cleansing away all the guilt of all their sins. As their glorious Head he sits

upon that throne in heaven, and there exercises universal dominion for them.

It is, therefore, of the Lord's believing family, even those who are redeemed from amongst men, those who are called into the fellowship of the Gospel by the power and grace of the Spirit, the saints of the Most High God, who are here declared to be members of the one family, bearing the name, possessing his Spirit, conformed to the image of God's dear Son, and joint heirs with him to the inheritance of a glorious patrimony.

This family, therefore, comprises all the saints that are already in heaven, and all the saints on earth who are on their way thither, however various may be the degrees of their knowledge, their spirituality, their faith, their hope, their holy joy, their devotedness, their zeal or usefulness amongst the saints of God upon earth. Some are called babes, some children, some young men, some old men and fathers; some are giants, others are dwarfs; some have dark

and distressing views of themselves and of their interest in Christ, yet their only hope is in Him; some have touched the hem of his garment, and they know it; some have advanced one step higher, they have been taught to lean upon Jesus as their Beloved, and thus they are coming out of, and turning their backs upon the wilderness,—a world lying in wickedness; and some have advanced even to a higher state than this, they are, like the beloved disciple, permitted and enabled by a living faith to recline on the bosom of their Lord and Saviour.

But whatever diversity existed among those to whom the Apostle addressed this question, they were all the children of God "by faith in Christ Jesus." Some were happy saints, living much upon Christ, walking directly with God —the true secret of all happiness. Others were heavy laden, sorely tried and tempted, full of doubts, fears, and hesitations; yet they were all alike children; and so it is with the children of God now, the very weakest and feeblest among them is as much a child as

the strongest, though they may not be living as fully in the enjoyment of that great and glorious privilege. And if we direct our thoughts upwards to the family in heaven, wherein shall we find that our state here differs very materially from their state in glory? Is it not in this, that while we see but in part, their vision is more perfect; we have no good but what is mixed with evil, while they are in possession of unmingled bliss? But still it is true the saints above are no more children than the saints on earth.

Observe, too, the *unity* of this family. They are all indebted to the same sovereign, distinguishing, electing love of God; for all that is good in them is of God, and all the grace they possess is the fruit of election, and not the cause of it. All are redeemed by the same precious blood, and without the shedding of that blood all would have been lost; all are toiling through the same world; all find it a path of tribulation, a path of sorrow, because it is a path of sin. They are alike in their wants, as in

the provision made to supply their necessities. The only thing they can feed upon is the children's bread; for though some are further advanced than others, yet they can find nothing to feed upon but Christ the living bread, "whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed;" and "He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." In the midst of continued and ever-varying trials and difficulties, they are travelling through the same waste howling wilderness, having the same hope to animate and cheer them onward, and soon they will arrive at their Father's house, in the land of everlasting bliss.

But remark, *there is a peculiar blessedness in this family union.* The Lord Jesus Christ, as we have shown, is their everlasting Father—and what a Father is he! That which comforted the soul of our dear Lord, was the prospect of beholding his seed saying—"Behold, I and the children which God hath given me." And well does he discharge a Father's part; he feeds them, he

clothes them, he watches over them, he attends on them when afflicted, making all their beds in their sickness; he is touched with the feeling of their infirmities; he brings them back when they wander; his eye is always on them for good—his eye of wisdom to guide them, his eye of sympathy to comfort them, his eye of love to protect them; his ear is ever open to their cry, and his heart always yearneth over them; they are encouraged to have the closest and sweetest communion with him, day by day and moment by moment; to open their whole hearts to him, to keep back from him no sorrow, no temptation, no trouble.

O beloved! contemplate the present blessedness of God's saints—these who are here spoken of as his adopted children; they were chosen in him from eternity, made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and they are sanctified by that faith that is of divine operation; they have a high interest in their Heavenly Father, they are "sons of God;" for, blessed be his name, such an interest

have all his children in him, that there is not one perfection of his nature in which he does not enable them from time to time to have communion with him. He has a deep interest in them, and in all that concerns them; his eye was fixed on them in eternity, and all through the winding vale of time his eye watches over them for good, and he will bring them safe to glory at last, and there enable them to sing victory through the blood of the Lamb.

They love him, though with but a poor and imperfect love, unworthy of themselves, and mingling itself continually with their own imperfections; but yet they love him sincerely; their hearts are towards him; he has drawn and overcome them by his grace: so that they are enabled, from deep affection to say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with thee." Still their love is like themselves—poor, imperfect, unworthy; but his love is like himself—perfect, immutable, eternal. He loved them for nothing

that he saw in them, but he loved them for his own name's sake; and though he sees in them continual cause wherefore he should love them no more, yet he "rests in his love," he "rejoices over them with singing," and loves them to the end. These are the seed whom the Lord hath blessed, and he has never left himself without such; though the world knows them not they are known to him, and will be known to him when time is no more.

O beloved! art thou a member of this large and highly distinguished family? Then be assured that thy Father loves thee, and taketh pleasure in thee; yea, he delighteth in thee. How desirable to realize this truth through all the stages of our eventful pilgrimage! Oh, to enter into its sweetness at this moment! Notwithstanding all that a pure and holy God not only *may* see, but *must* see in us, unworthy even of ourselves, and contrary to his infinite purity, we are personally dear to him and ever will be so.

Nor does he regard with less interest their *graces*—all the workings of his own blessed Spirit in them. O beloved! thy repentance, poor as it is—thy prayers, imperfect as they are—every thought, every struggle with sin, every contest with the enemy, every real desire after heavenly progress—in the exhibition of each and of all these graces, thy Father taketh pleasure in thee. You that are light in your own eyes, you that are poor in spirit, you that have been taught to think meanly of yourselves (or rather let me say, to think *justly* of yourselves) though you are ready to say, "The Lord hath forgotten me, and my God hath forsaken me;" yet look up, ye heirs of God, when you are told that there is not one going forth of desire after God, but the Lord taketh pleasure in it for his own name's sake. Your attempts to glorify him, your desires to walk in his ways, your cup of cold water, your widow's mite, your inward struggles and your inward pangs—though the world knows them not, and though even the saints of God cannot

discern them, yet God discerns them, and it is your mercy to know that "as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." If we did but realize these truths in our hearts, we should find that they lead to him: they draw the heart to him; they humble the heart in abasement before him, and raise it up towards him in holy affection.

There is one point, however, I would especially remark upon; they not only bear his image, but HIS NAME, "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." They are led by his Spirit, and are spiritual; they are anointed in his name, and are Christians. Oh! what a name, to be a Christian! To be a holy man, to be a devoted man, how exalted the privilege, yet to be a Christian seems to be something above this, because it does embrace all these things. I am quite aware that we live in days in which the name of Christian signifies little or nothing; doth it not show how low we must have fallen that a man can be a Christless man and yet bear the name of

Christ. Some think that the disciples of the Lord were named after Christ by their enemies, who gave them the name of Christians as a term of reproach; but for this opinion there appears to be no foundation whatever.

In reference to *the origin of the family name.* "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." Some say that they gave it to themselves. The words demand to be read thus: that these two Apostles, Paul and Barnabas, called the disciples Christians; and there is that in the word translated "called" that especially leads to the belief that it was God's appointment. Let me bring before you the only instances in which the word occurs in the New Testament: in the Gospel of Matthew, second chapter, the twelfth and twenty-second verses, it is "warned;" in Luke's Gospel, the second chapter, the twenty-sixth verse, it is "revealed;" in the Acts of the Apostles, the tenth chapter, the twenty-second verse, it is "warned"; in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the eighth chapter

the fifth verse, it is "admonished;" the eleventh chapter, the seventh verse; in the twelfth chapter, the twenty-fifth verse, it is "speaketh." In all these instances it is the same word and refers to the teaching of God. Again, in the Epistle to the Romans, the seventh chapter, the third verse, it is "called." At first sight there seems no reference to God, but it is so if we look into it—called so by the holy law of God. Why do I multiply proof? For this reason: it is the full persuasion of my mind, that the two Apostles called the disciples Christians under the especial admonition of God, therefore I cannot but mourn at the variety of names that exist in the church. If it was enough at Antioch, why is it not enough in London? Why, if brothers differ from brothers upon ordinances and doctrines of minor importance, is there a necessity for coining names that may designate a party?

But we now come to another point—to consider *the weighty import of the name.* It exhibits them as believers in Christ.

This is set forth as the turning point in the First Epistle of John, the fifth chapter, the first verse. Nature can do much; nature can regulate the conduct, it can influence the temper, but it never leads a man to believe in Christ; this is the work of the Holy Ghost. To enable me to believe in him as my only resting place, to rest in him as my anointed Priest, to induce me to lay aside all confidence in myself and to place my confidence in him—this is the work of the Holy Ghost.

But this their family name is *a badge of separation from the world.* Believers are separated from the world by electing love, by God's effectual call, by being born of his Spirit, by their tempers, by their spirit, and by their conduct. How suitable then that they should be separated by a name. The separation of God's people from the world is one of the great requirements of the Gospel, although it is a most unpalatable truth. To be a Christian now is an easy thing; every man considers himself a Chris-

tian; the drunkard, the duellist, is a Christian, the mere formalist—they are all regarded as Christians, though they know no more of Christ, experimentally, than a Hindoo. This separation between Christians and the world ought ever to be preserved and maintained; and I believe it is Satan's work to destroy the marks of that boundary line which the Scriptures have drawn to separate Christians from the world.

It is a name of most *tender union.* Believers constitute one family, one fold, one house, one temple, one vine—one in Christ, having his name. He is no more Jew, no more Gentile, no longer is it male or female; all are ONE IN CHRIST. The same blood has redeemed them and washed them from all their sins. They are interested in the same covenant privileges; they are animated by the one hope set before them.

But it seems also a *mark of most gracious distinction.* If we look at a child of God in himself, he is a poor feeble worm, owing ten thousand talents and has not one farthing

to discharge the mighty debt. Yet in another point of view what a glorious object is he—a "child of God," a "heir of God," a "joint heir with Christ." The priest of God, offering authorized and acceptable worship; the temple of God, "ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them;" a king, one of the royal family, "He hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father."

This name is the *symbol of our allegiance.* It is as much as if he had said to us, "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price;" "ye are Christ's," give yourselves up to him, body, soul, and spirit.

It is no small mercy, beloved, for a man to *know his name.* There are numbers who do not know their own name. Oh! thou poor lover of sin and the world, didst thou know thy own name it would be Adam, "of the earth earthy;" it would be Gershom, a stranger to the covenant of promise. Alas! how many have been led to think themselves

Christians! They have taken the name to themselves; God never gave it them. But there are some of God's children who are in that state that if they were asked, have you the name of the family, they do not know their name; all they can say is, "I hope so; I have no other hope but in Christ." If you shall ask, Are you are a Christian? their only reply is, "Would I could say so." O beloved! God calls you by this name—a name above every name. "A Christian," says the poet, "is the highest style of man;" and by this the whole "family in heaven and earth is named." Was there ever a man who left his own righteousness, and desired to "win Christ and to be found in him," who was not taught of the Holy Spirit? God calls thee a Christian. Answer ye to your name; answer to it with God and before the world. "Glory ye, therefore, in his holy name."

But there are some, and we desire to thank God on their behalf, who have the name and know it! It is not with the high and

lofty confidence of the mere notionalist; but they have been brought into the family, and the Spirit beareth witness with their spirits that they are the children of God. Having received the spirit of adoption, they can humbly and with holy confidence say, "Abba, Father." Oh! how does this subject address itself to every member of the family. O beloved! sever yourselves from the world; sever yourselves from everything sinful; sever yourselves from worldly professors. Remember your distinctive badge and name. The name of Christian is a sweet, a sacred name; avoid whatever shall disgrace the name whereby you are called; stand aloof from all and everything which is calculated to separate the one family; study to promote and cherish all that tends to unite every member thereof still closer in bonds of affection. But ever remember that it is only as we draw near to Christ, and as we live in him, that we realize the advantages of family union.

In conclusion, let me ask you, my brother,

a question—a solemn question. To whom do you belong? Are you a child in this family? Let no one settle this matter for you; answer it yourselves. When I think how many at this moment are living in a state of awful opposition to God, and when I think too how easy it is to sit under the means of grace and yet remain in sin, my heart feels the solemnity of this interrogation—"Are you of this family?"

The greatest evidence of belonging to this family *is receiving Christ.* A man may do a thousand things that you have never done; but if he is not building on Christ, he is building on the sand. O beloved! be sure you set not your standard too low; some can talk of Gospel privileges, and yet live in opposition to the holiness of the Gospel. They are strangers to spiritual conflict, and to mourning for sin after a godly sort.

But to the true child of God *what a soul cheering subject is this.* The family is artly on earth, and partly in heaven They

who are now in heaven were once as we are;

> "They wrestled hard as we do now,
> With sins and doubts and fears."

But they are now safe, and the same grace that brought them there can bring you safely through all the dangers and difficulties of the desert through which you are passing. Their Father is your Father, their God is your God, their portion is your portion; however ye may feel yourselves strangers upon earth, they felt the same, and they are now with Christ.

It is *a heart-uniting subject*—one family, one feast, one spirit, one home. Oh, see the true bond of union! Oh, how it ought to draw our hearts one to another, that we have the prospect of soon being together in heaven!

And when we consider, too, that we are called Christians. What was I? A rebel—a worldling. And can I, who am a child of God, a member of Christ's mystical body,

and an heir of heaven, be loving the world, and making a God of the creature? To see a Christian grovelling upon earth—a Christian mingling with this world! What an awful sight—what an abasing thought! Let it be our daily prayer, that while in the world we may be kept from the evil.

IX.

The Inner Life.

"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."—EPHESIANS iii. 16.

IT can only be said of One who alone is infinite and eternal, "Thou art the same." If there were only that one proof of the true Deity of our blessed Lord, it would be abundantly satisfactory—since that title is assigned him by God the Father himself. Mutability and change belong to every creature. If the holy angels and the spirits of departed saints are in safety, it is because the elect angels are kept from falling by the mighty power of God; and because the spirits of the just, made

perfect, are filled with God himself; and even then it may be doubted whether it can be said of them absolutely, that there can be no change in them, for there must be progression; and progression in knowledge involves a change from one degree of glory to another. It can never therefore be said of any creature that he possesses an attribute which belongs peculiarly to the Creator. If we look at creation—the vegetable world, how ever varying and changeable are its aspects; and this variableness characterises the animal world and the rational world. Everywhere, and in all things, there is change, there is life, there is growth, there is maturity, there is decay, there is death; while in the new creation, thanks be to God, there is no death, no spiritual death, yet there is progression; and if there be an advance, there may be also a decay.

The Apostle felt deeply; he prayed earnestly and with deep humility for these Ephesian saints in this earnest, fervent, and sublime prayer "That he would grant you,

according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man"—a prayer that as one reads it one is almost led to say, now one stands on nothing less than the threshhold of the Gospel. In his supplications for them he did not ask God to bestow upon them worldly prosperity; nor did he implore that they might be preserved from persecution—his own trials and persecutions for their sakes had been accompanied with so many special blessings, that he dared not ask for that. He did not merely ask that they might have great accessions in numbers—that is, or that is not, a blessing as God makes it—nor did he pray thus fervently that they might have large bestowments of gifts, though that might be a great blessing to the Church if it did not take the place of grace. But it was that they might be favoured with a large increase of grace that he prayed, and his first petition was, that they might "be strengthened with all might by his Spirit in their inner man."

In order that we may enter fully and spiritually into the import of the Apostle's request, we must take into consideration the whole connection of the passage—and, indeed, that is the only way that we can at any time read Scripture aright. We find that the tribulations the Apostle endured for their sakes must have wrought a double effect; they were ready to faint on his account, and they must have been ready to faint in respect to themselves.

O beloved! if the time and scenes of persecution were again to be renewed, we should then know what is the meaning of that word, "faint." But however fierce the storm of trial and persecution which may come upon "the faithful in Christ Jesus," it is our mercy to know that the perseverance of God's saints is just as secure as the throne of God. The covenant of grace secures it; the immutability of God secures it; the mediation and suretiship engagements and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ secure it; the love, power, wisdom, holi-

ness, mercy, and faithfulness of God secure it; the indwelling of the Holy Ghost secures it; the incorruptibility of the holy seed secures it. Who is there of the Lord's family who does not say—"If any one saint of God could fall away, I must have fallen, and, if not upheld, may yet fall away." But "the Lord preserveth the feet of his saints;" they shall "never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hands."

The Apostle Paul in thus praying on their behalf, that they in their times of fainting might be upheld and sustained, did but pray for the very blessings God had designed to give; and thus the Lord hath ever stirred up his people to pray for mercy and grace to help them in every time of their need; for it is in the way of fervent, believing supplication that the Lord doth administer this blessing—"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

But was this the only thing for which the Apostle prayed? I hope, my brother, you have been led to value something more than mere perseverance; an ungodly man can value and admire decision and constancy, in whatever cause it is displayed; but the perseverance which the covenant of grace secures, is perseverance in the ways of God; and what the Apostle prayed for is this—a large accession of grace; he wanted them to be strengthened with all might; to be filled with all the fulness of God, to have a deeper knowledge, higher spirituality, fuller and clearer witnessings of the Spirit—he prayed for increased sanctification.

By the term "inner man," I do not conceive that the Apostle is to be understood as referring merely to the soul of believers. Remember that expression of our Lord's, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh:" and if you carry that idea on to the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the twenty-second verse, you will perceive that the Apostle there states that he

delighted "in the law of God after the inward man." The same idea is conveyed in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the fourth chapter, and sixteenth verse, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." How often have we witnessed the decay of the natural faculties in Christians. The mind has become weak, and the powers of the strongest and most vigorous intellect have been prostrated—a mere wreck; reason, imagination, memory, have all undergone a sad and silent decay. But how often, when this natural decay has been visible, has the inward man appeared vigorous. Who does not see the difference between the natural powers of the soul and this inward spiritual principle? In the third chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians the same idea is set forth by the expression "the new man;" and in the First Epistle of Peter, the third chapter and fourth verse, it is spoken of as "the hidden man of the heart." By it I conceive is meant that new principle, that germ of divine life,

that "incorruptible seed" which is wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost.

What a contrast does this description of the new and living principle in the soul of believers present to that which we find in God's word concerning the wicked and the unregenerate: "The carnal mind" is declared by this Apostle to be "enmity against God." Oh! let us beware of a semi-pelagianism, which would lead us to a different conclusion respecting the total depravity of human nature than that expressed by our Lord when he said, that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man." It will be no small mercy if we are led to examine ourselves and see by what motives we are influenced, and what is the governing principle of our life, and also at the same time to look at the blood of Christ, and to admire the grace of God in plucking us as brands from the burning.

This request and these several statements

imply that the Apostle was conscious of the inherent weakness of these saints; and that while "in the Lord they had righteousness and strength," yet in themselves they were, oh! how utterly weak. What can be more weak and helpless than an unfledged bird? Yet the Lord speaks of himself as an eagle stirring up her nest, fluttering over her young, bearing them on her wing. What can be more weak than a branch? Not only may it be fruitless and fall—it not only *will* fall, but it *must* fall if severed from the stem—"Without me ye can do nothing." Can there be a greater picture of helplessness than the lamb or the sheep; the youngest wolf can destroy a whole flock—yet, said our Lord to his little flock of disciples, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." —"But," he also says, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hands." "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, and shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom."

In this figure the lamb seems to be so near its Shepherd as if nothing could be nearer; and what stands so near to the Lord Jesus as his own people—weak though they be, and all feeble and helpless? He is one with them and they are one with him. Does not the description of the posture of the lamb convey the deep conviction of its safety? If the lamb is in the bosom of the Shepherd, he that destroyeth the lamb, methinks, must destroy the Shepherd. If he has in his bosom love enough, and if he has in his arms strength enough, then for the lamb to perish is as impossible as it is for him to perish.

What encouragement is this sweet portion to thee, my brother, who dost feel thyself to be the weakest and feeblest of all God's children. Oh, remember that the weak believer is, in some sense, a stronger exhibition of the power of God than the strongest, inasmuch as he furnishes a clear proof that not by his own strength he stands, nor by his own stores he lives—a weak, trembling fibre, shaken by the wind—and yet all the

powers of sin and Satan are unable to uproot him. For what purpose does the Good Shepherd cherish the lambs of his flock? Is it not to supply all their wants? It is not merely to preserve and to protect them, but to nourish and strengthen them that they may grow and thrive.

Who that looks at a worm does not see its utter weakness? "Fear not thou worm Jacob—I will help thee, saith the Lord and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." Some may be ready to say, "Ah! but who is so weak as I am?" Yet the Saviour descends lower than that to thee, in the figures he employs to set forth human weakness. Remember that it is thy weakness that affords an opportunity for the display of Divine all-sufficiency, in fitting thee for the work and service to which thou art called, and in strengthening thee for thy daily walk, and for the incessant warfare, the sharp and fierce conflict with a legion of foes, in which thou hast moment by moment to engage.

It is not a light thing, my brother, to live a life of faith upon the Son of God; to live upon the atonement; to live out of thyself upon another; to feel thyself as weak at the last as at the first; to lift up the banner against the enemy; to love Christ; to love his holy precepts, to walk in them to all well pleasing.

It is not a little strength that will suffice. We are called to engage in a fight that never ends. When we come off victors in one conflict, and the Lord has been putting the palm in our hands, we have the same conflict to fight over again. We are on a voyage that keeps us always out at sea, shivering and weak in the midst of the storm. Our course is a race that we are always running. The work of grace, from first to last, is carried on in the very teeth of Satan, and in direct opposition to the flesh; we have to advance against wind and tide; there is not a single principle of our nature but what is against that which is spirit in us. Did you ever see the process of mortification; in its first begin-

ning it affects but a small member, but it rapidly spreads over the whole body. We are called upon to "mortify the deeds of the body." We know crucifixion to be a most painful death, and it is enjoined upon us to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." What an expression is that of our Lord, "If any man cometh to me, and hateth not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Oh! my brother, did you ever think of it and pray over it? What! do you object to the strictness of our Lord's requirements, and do you ask can there be anything in the Gospel of Jesus that is so morose and unlovely? While there is not anything in the religion of Jesus Christ that is opposed to the duties we owe to our relations and to society, on the contrary, the Gospel teaches a man to be a better father, a better child, a better servant; it could not come from God if it were not so—yet the Lord God Almighty doth claim the very

best place for himself—and why? Because he is jealous of our love, and it is his gracious intention to fill us with himself.

And for all these exercises of faith, love, and self-denial, the Lord will give strength unto his people; for he "giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." The necessities of God's people seem to touch his very heart, and he will grant them help in every time of need.

Oh, to give him the first place in our affections and pursuits, how does it involve the stemming of corruption, the overcoming of self! But the expression is very strong—"strengthened with might." If you turn to the first chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, the eleventh verse, you will see a still stronger expression — "strengthened with all might according to his glorious power." And we want "all might." We are but incompetent judges as to the difficulties of others; and at times we can enter but very feebly into our own. They are com-

pared in God's word to an overwhelming flood; and there are those of the Lord's family who have had to ford this flood, and to breast its proud waves, and who know that no human power is sufficient to stand against the mighty torrents of trouble which sometimes set in against the godly.

Every creature is of necessity weak, and has no power to sustain itself; but even the renewed creature is weak, though not actually devoid of all strength, for how could the Lord be said to "increase strength" if there were no strength in existence, or to "renew their strength" if some strength had not been previously bestowed? Still, however, the believer in himself, and of himself, is weakness; and, if left to himself, powerless, and unable to cope with one enemy, to overcome one foe, or to maintain his own standing for one single moment.

But besides this, there are certain periods when the believer is more than ordinarily faint and weak. There are many things to try him. When he sees the foes that beset

him, and when he looks to himself more than to God's promise, his heart faints within him, and his fears prevail; then he says, "I shall one day perish by the hand of my enemy." And sometimes the discovery of his own impotency and insufficiency for his work and warfare disheartens him; so that he feels as though he had no strength at all. The businesses of life and worldly engagements often prove impediments and hindrances to believers in their heavenward course; thus spirituality declines; prayer is neglected; the blessing is withholden; the sweet sense of the love of God in the heart is no longer a solace and a support to them; their evidences of interest in Christ are beclouded, and their hearts are weakened and sad; and oftentimes also, through unwatchfulness and neglect of secret communion, their strength declines; for one day of unwatchfulness and careless walking takes away all our strengthenings. One worldly association, one companion, one friend, one unhappy intimacy, oh, how often it weakens the child of God!

how, like Samson, is he shorn of his strength, and he knows it not.

Observe that *the immediate Agent in strengthening believers is the Holy Spirit.* The Apostle prays that they might be "strengthened with might by his Spirit." The immediate Strengthener, therefore, is the Holy Ghost. This office he has, in the covenant of grace, undertaken to fulfil. This, had he not have been God, he never could have done. We want One to strengthen us who is Omnipresent, Omniscient, and Omnipotent—he is all this. He, dwelling in the heart, works this new nature. This hidden man is his sole workmanship, for we are said to be "created anew in Christ Jesus."

Sometimes this "inner man" is spoken of in reference to the understanding, as light, in reference to the will, as submission, in reference to the heart, as love. It is spoken of as the faith, that lays holds of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus; as the love, that delights in Him.

But though the Spirit of Christ dwells in

the soul, yet if he did not put forth his power there would be no spiritual act performed by us; without this there would be no prayer and no praise, no holy walking, and no communion. Besides this, there are special seasons when the soul seems to desire greater spirituality; and this is the state here set before us.

The Apostle had the greatest possible encouragement, in the exceeding great and precious promises, and in the love and faithfulness of the divine promises, to expect that the Lord would bestow upon them what he here supplicates on their behalf.

But *in what way may we expect to realize the strength which he imparts to the faint and the weak.* It is obtained, not by seeking it of any creature, but by casting ourselves on the Lord. Oh, believer, when thou art enabled to betake thyself to the throne of grace, and art led by the Holy Spirit to Jesus, to the atoning blood, to the perfect righteousness, to the infinite merit there is in Jesus, thou dost draw nigh to One who will

reveal himself to thee as thy Father; and thou dost realize that his comforts soothe and tranquillize thy troubled soul. It is in this way that he helps thee by imparting to thee all needful strength. Thus prayerfulness leads to strength, that leads to valour and courage, that leads to patience, and that leads to praise.

So by the Word the Holy Spirit strengthens and comforts the children of God. How often, my brother, does it seem to be God himself speaking to thee through his word, as he comforts thee, quiets thee, lifts thee up, sanctifies thee, and stirs thee up to take hold of his covenant; and thus thou art strengthened in the Lord and by the power of his might.

Oh, beloved, look at the fountain whence all the blessings of grace and glory flow in such copious streams! Look at the treasury from whence are derived the "riches of his glory." To set forth these there seems a redundancy of expression; not only "grace," but "riches of grace"; not only "glory," but

"riches of glory." Why all this variety and exuberance of expression but because God's grace is his glory; yes, beloved, grace is the very glory of God. "I beseech thee," said Moses, "show me thy glory;" and the Lord granted his request, so far as to make all his glory to pass before him; and it is said, "The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."

Holiness is the beauty of God; justice is the display of that beauty, for it is but the activity of that holiness; power is the arm of God; wisdom is the eye of God; mercy is the bowels of God, but grace is the glory of God; and therefore the Apostle prayed that the Ephesians might be strengthened with

might by the Holy Spirit in their "inner man" according to the "riches in glory." Dost thou, my brother, feel thyself to be of sinners the chief, and the vilest of the vile?—and doth the question come into thy soul, "Is it possible that there can be salvation for such a sinner as I?" Oh, remember, the glory of God is his grace. What vast encouragement is there in this thought, that believers are helped, strengthened, and supplied, not according to their deservings or their fears, but according to the riches of glory. How this should cheer the hearts of all God's people!

The consideration of this subject ought also to lead us to see *the importance of this prayer*—how much we at all times need to be strengthened with all might "in our inner man." And there are times when we more especially need the help and strength from our Almighty and loving Helper. Oh, the blessedness of being strong in faith, strong in submission, strong in patience, strong in devotedness, strong in hope,

strong in desires to yield oneself to God, body, soul, and spirit—which is our "reasonable service." I will not say, I envy that soul; but I desire to be like that soul that longs most for its enjoyment.

Alas! what weakness have we too often shown, instead of being "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." We have had chapter after chapter, rod after rod, mercy after mercy, deliverance after deliverance, yet how little have we been strengthened by all these manifestations of God's grace and goodness. Whence is it? Is it not because we have not laid it enough upon our hearts? Oh, is it laid so much upon our hearts as to cause us to reason thus, If the Apostle thus bowed his knees in prayer in behalf of the members of the Church of Ephesus—how comes it to pass that I so seldom bend my knees for this spiritual strengthening?

Do we sufficiently honour the Spirit in seeking this strength? He should and must be acknowledged as the immediate Agent in

communicating all spiritual blessings unto the Lord's family. It is his special office and work in the covenant of grace. Do we watch for his gracious operations? Are we conscious when he is moving on our hearts? Oh, let us, beloved brethren, beware of losing ourselves in a crowd.

Let us ever be forward in *cherishing thankfulness of spirit* for what we have realized of imparted strength ourselves. To be always praying for more grace, and never thanking our gracious Friend and Helper for what we have received, has in it a depth of ingratitude of which we should be heartily ashamed. To induce us to this grateful remembrance of the Lord's mercy and grace towards us, let us think of his electing love, of his redeeming and converting grace, as displayed on our behalf; and, at the same time, think of those who have never heard the Gospel, who are yet in the "gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity." It will do thee good, my brother, to inquire how it comes to pass that your

heart feels his name at times to be precious —that you find any alleviation of sorrow at a throne of grace? Oh, if you do not praise him for imparted favours, that you are so frequently complaining of having received so little may be easily accounted for.

It is greatly to be feared that Christians do not sufficiently observe and reflect upon the *manner* of the Spirit's operations. In your addresses to the throne of grace you may often pray to be thus strengthened, but do you know by experience this truth—that the way by which the Holy Spirit strengthens us is by the testifying of Jesus to us. There may be much activity in religious exercises, and, at the same time, much dryness of spirit in the midst of it all. Alas! how little of Christ is thought of or enjoyed in our services. This then is the method the Spirit takes in strengthening the saints—by testifying of Jesus to their souls, glorifying Jesus in their esteem, and by the shedding abroad the love of God in their hearts. As this

strengthening of the "inner man" is to be realized by a diligent, prayerful, and believing use of the means of grace, let us avail ourselves of our privileges, in the use of all the helps so graciously afforded and so abundantly promised us. The way by which God increases grace in our souls, is by leading us to use what we have, and to seek for more. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

X.

Christ in the Heart.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."
EPHES. iii. 17.

ALTHOUGH there is no book in which there is so little of order as the Bible, in the arrangement of the subjects therein revealed on points where order would be of little use and value, yet when order is needful—and in reference to the great and fundamental truths of the Gospel—we find a most beautiful and perfect order of arrangement is preserved. Thus, as to the connection of the passage before us, we perceive the great springhead of all blessing is "the riches of God's glory"—that grace which is his glory. We find how the Apostle supplicated with fervent prayer and humility of spirit that he

would grant unto his people, according to the amplitude of these resources of grace and glory, that they might be supplied with all needful strength, so that "their inner man might be renewed day by day." The first of all blessings, in point of value and in point of order herein stated, being that the Holy Ghost would strengthen his own work, that he would preserve, uphold, and carry it on with increased vigour. Oh! how needful is this grace; for our dependence is not upon the work of grace begun within us, but upon the Holy Ghost sustaining it by his mighty power. In the text the Apostle follows out the same train of thought, giving to it a greater breadth and fulness of idea; so that the truth is presented to us not only in its fulness and in its beauty and symmetry, but in the most beautiful order of arrangement as to its several and constituent parts.

That we may have a scriptural and spiritual view of the subject, let us first consider *the state* of those individuals for whom the Apostle thus prayed—"that Christ might

dwell in your hearts by faith." This is of very considerable importance, because you will find that most commentators speak of it as if it were the *first* work of grace in the heart to which the Apostle refers, when, as is most evident from the preceding portions of this Epistle, and in those verses upon which we have already meditated, these members of the church at Ephesus are addressed as believers, as the saints of God, as having been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and accepted in the Beloved. The Apostle therefore prays for them as regenerated souls, and they are here addressed as such throughout the Epistle. Apply these addresses and prayers to any other than to believers, and you make the Apostle to give expression to that which is utterly unintelligible.

It is most evident, therefore, that in praying that "Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith," the Apostle cannot be considered as referring to the time when Christ first takes possession of a sinner's soul in conversion. He had already, as

we have seen, taken possession of their hearts as his royal residence, according to the covenant of grace made with them, wherein God declares "I will dwell in them."

There is a sense in which we may say that our Lord is everywhere. Look at the hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm and pray over it. We therein see how boundless and infinite the omnipresence of God is; and the Lord Jesus Christ is equally omnipresent with the Father and the Holy Ghost. If we ascend up into heaven, he is there; if we go down to hell, he is there; if we would fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, behold he is there, he is with us, about our path, and spieth out all our ways. We cannot see him, we cannot touch him, we cannot hear him—with our bodily senses, but he is not far from every one of us. This, however, is not the sense of the passage before us.

He is not only in the universe, which is filled with his glory, essentially, but he is in his church mediatorially; he is the King of Zion; he is the sole Sovereign and Head

of the Church; he is Master in his own house. This is not only true of his people collectively, but *he dwells in each individual member of the one family;* as he himself saith, "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him." This is our Lord's own description of every one of his true disciples. Each believer in him is his temple—his habitation; the life of each one, the source and sustenance of all life is in him. He is their great vital Head; and because he lives, they also live; and because he ever lives, they shall also live for ever.

These, beloved brethren, are solid, substantial truths of Christianity. These are the truths that bear up our souls in the contemplation of that hour when we shall sleep in death; so that if we have fears that when we die we may be unable to speak of large enjoyments in realizing these truths, yet these truths that reveal Christ as our indwelling life are the truths that bear up our souls in the contemplation of all that lies before

us. "Examine yourselves," said the Apostle, in writing to the Corinthians. And, oh, beloved, take nothing for granted which has reference to so important a matter as this—examine yourselves; bring your experience to this touchstone: "Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates?"

But this indwelling of Christ *is the distinguishing mark of all his people.* Christ is in them; we have this placed before us in full explanation in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the ninth verse: "Ye are not in the flesh," saith the Apostle, "but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his; and if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness." So that believers are not in the flesh nor living after the flesh, though the flesh is in them. Christ dwells in each of his people's hearts, and this forms their true security.

But not only does Christ dwell in them,

but they *dwell in him;* and this is the great work of the Holy Ghost to lead us out of ourselves to Christ, to take up our abode in him. Oh, what a blessed Ark is he to all his people. The mighty deep is all around them, yet they are safe in him; not one drop of the penal storm can ever touch their head. How blessed a dwelling is it to all those who, through grace, have been either drawn or driven to it as their only "hiding place" from the storm of divine vengeance which shall ere long overtake a guilty world! If thou hast, my brother, been by the terror of a moment, or by a more gradual process, induced to flee for safety to Christ, the Ark of salvation; yet, if thou hast entered in by faith, give God thanks for having sweetly forced thee in, and hast shut thee in, so that thou shalt never perish, neither shall any one be able to pluck thee out of thine Ark of refuge.

This abiding in Christ is the one only place of rest in the midst of the world's temptations, its cares, its sorrows, and its fierce and bitter

conflicts; for "there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." Dwelling in Christ, and Christ dwelling in them, they have fellowship with God himself: "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Oh, what a glorious rest! How safe and happy is that soul which has taken up its abode with God and says—"Thou art with me," therefore "I will fear no evil; for thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Consider *what this prayer of the Apostle included.* In praying that Christ might dwell in their hearts, he did not pray that Christ might love them any better. I have often thought how wonderful it is, that in all his prayers and supplications for the saints, the Apostle never prays that Christ may love them more; nor does the believer, in praying for himself, pray that Christ may love him more. Whence is it? Because in the midst of all his low views of Christ, and of his interest in the great salvation, the cross has that place in the believer's esti-

mation, that thus he reasons—"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,"—for his enemies too. So the Lord Jesus Christ could not love his people more than to give his life a ransom for them. In this he has given them the highest —yea, an infinite proof of his love towards them. Neither did the Apostle, as we have already shewn, pray that they might begin to love Christ; some of them had for a long time loved him; and they did now love him. This, their faith in him, and love to him, is what distinguished them. So it is now; the Lord's family are not distinguished by splendid talents, many of them have but little of that; they are not distinguished by wealth, many of them are poor; nor are they distinguished by the largeness of their numbers, they are comparatively but few; but they love Christ, and this it is that separates and distinguishes them from the world.

Dost thou, my brother, sometimes ask thyself whether thou dost really love thy blessed Lord, and art saying—

"'Tis a point I long to know—
Oft it causes anxious thought—
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?"

Oh, wouldst thou not, if thou wert asked whether thou wouldst part with all thy worldly substance, or all that thou dost hold most dear, or part with Christ, wouldst thou not say—I would part with all, though dear as life, rather than with Christ and my hope of salvation in him. Oh, yes, every heaven-taught soul will say all this; therefore, if you have so learned Christ, you ought to go on your way rejoicing that you have "Christ formed in your heart—the hope of glory."

The Apostle prayed for the *increase* of that love which had already taken up its abode in their hearts. This, therefore, I conceive to be the plain, simple meaning of the passage — it was that Christ might take full possession of them; that whatever in their hearts stood opposed to the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ and

the graces of his Spirit, might be cast out. And is there, beloved, no necessity for such a prayer in thy case? Oh, when we consider the trifles that occupy us—and here I would not be misunderstood—if the Lord in his providence calls us to engage in worldly pursuits, they cease to be trifles, and become important immediately; but when we enter upon these trifles unbidden; when they needlessly, unseasonably, and immoderately engage our attention, absorb our thoughts, and steal away our hearts from better things—when they take away that which belongs to God, then how much cause have we to lament that "trifles of nature or of art," and even the cares and comforts of life, have obtained such an influence over us as to interpose between God and our souls. For an unspiritual heart is an unbelieving heart, ever ready to look at any thing rather than Christ. How often, my brother, hath indecision of character, of conduct, and of principle, hindered us from enjoying the privileges of this blessed condi-

tion? It was with his eye on these things, that the Apostle besought the Lord "that Christ might dwell in their hearts."

In thus praying, it is as if Paul had said, Oh, that Christ may have the best, the choicest of your affections! that He who hath not withheld himself from you on account of your sins, may give you increasingly to know and value his love and grace; that daily and hourly you may become by degrees better acquainted with the worth of his character, and with your absolute dependence upon himself; and that this estimation of his excellent loving-kindness may greatly increase and become more solid.

What an inestimable blessing it is when the believer is brought to this! It is then that clearer manifestations of Christ's love are made to his soul. In the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel by John, the twenty-first verse, our Lord says, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will

manifest myself to him." And he adds—"We will come unto him, and make our abode with him." So that it is not of a first, but a further manifestation that Christ spake unto his disciples, and for which the Apostle here prayed.

It is the glory of the covenant of grace that all the Lord's adopted and regenerated family shall arrive safe to glory; yet there may for a time be no apparent progress made by them in the divine life. They are called by grace, they have been brought to the foot of the cross of Jesus, they have entered the city of refuge, and their only hope is founded on the precious blood of the atoning sacrifice, and on the perfect righteousness of the Son of God; they are brought, in other words, into a region of safety where the avenger of blood, blessed be God! cannot touch or destroy them. And here too many are disposed to stop, forgetting what love God hath laid up for his children in the covenant of grace, and that they need to be continually supplied out of these riches of grace and

glory. Many things are wanting to take them forward in the ways of God; they want more light in their understanding, more tenderness in their conscience; they want their affections more stirred up to the love of God; they want more maturity of judgment in the things of God.

Art thou, my brother, my sister, longing for more sanctity, and earnestly praying to God that thou mayest know more of Christ and the power of his resurrection, and be made more conformable to his holy image? If Christ has taken possession of thy heart it will be so; for wherever Christ dwells there will be a holy influence felt in the inner man, regulating and controlling the temper, producing in the spirit an ardent longing after God; leading to greater devotedness of service to Christ, and to more of spiritual mindedness, and of "setting the affections on things above and not on things on the earth."

Behold the *constraining influence* of this indwelling of Christ in the believer's heart

in the experience of the Apostle himself. It led him to preach Christ, and to become as it were the servant of all for Christ's sake.

Observe with *what views it led him to think of death:* "We are confident," he says, "and willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord." It led him to be willing to be esteemed as one beside himself, so that God might be glorified, sinners converted, and believers edified; "for," says he, "whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us." And in his whole life we may see the holy, the self-denying, the exalting effects of "Christ dwelling in the heart by faith."

This indwelling of Christ in the heart is here said to be realized "by faith," because faith is the great receiving grace, and Christ is received into the heart by faith. Faith opens the door of the heart to Christ that he may make it his abiding resi-

dence. Believers having thus received him by faith, so it is by faith they walk in him; "For," saith the Apostle "we walk by faith, not by sight." Faith exalts Jesus, and exalting him, puts him on the throne of their affections, their reason, and their wills; and thus by faith Christ becomes to his people increasingly precious. That is a beautiful and soothing expression, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Many are the grades and degrees of this receiving grace, and there is the same diversity with regard to the different stages to which it may have brought us in our spiritual and onward progress; but here is a blessing pronounced upon all whose hearts Christ has taken possession of.

And, oh, beloved, forget not that, in having Christ in you you have *Christ with you*, day by day and moment by moment. He is with you and will be with you in the hour of death, in all your trials and afflictions, in all difficulties and temptations, in all your fears and griefs, and then take you to himself in glory,

where you shall be ever with the Lord and be like him evermore.

In receiving Christ into thine heart, O believer, thou hast with him *received full redemption.* In possessing Christ in the glories of his person thou hast that which includes all other glory; thou hast Christ in the fulness of his pardoning, justifying and sanctifying grace, as the pledge and prelude of the fulness of his glory.

While we have abundant reason to bless God and to adore him for the grace bestowed, yet still *how much cause have we to unite* in this prayer! When we think of those trifles which are so ensnaring, and think of our trials, our corruptions, and temptations, what cause have we, my brother, to be humbled, and stirred up fervently to adopt this prayer for ourselves, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith!

Let us, therefore, keep in mind *the great principle* here involved. The people of God could not be saints at all if they had not these longing desires after the divine image.

These desires spring from the Holy Spirit; they are the fruit of his own work in our hearts, and the best evidence of our meetness to be "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

But see also the *medium* by which the Holy Ghost works in bringing into existence and active operation this holy principle. The saints long after greater deadness to the world, and to be more heavenly minded; and nothing but Christ dwelling in the heart can produce this spirituality of character and of conduct. Do we desire that our religion may have more of the likeness of God in it? Christ dwelling in the heart can alone produce this increase in godliness. Do we wish for more power over our tempers and our indwelling corruptions?—behold, Christ dwelling in the heart will enable us to keep under the body and to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." Oh, let us honour the Holy Ghost by distinctly and constantly acknowledging that it is his especial work to form Christ in our hearts, the

source and strength of our graces and the hope of glory. Let us beware of grieving this glorious Guest; indulged sin will grieve him; neglect of known duty will do it. As faith is the means of enjoying this distinguished privilege, let us therefore avoid whatever weakens our faith; but rather may we study how we may promote and increase its more vigorous exercise.

XI.

The Source and Stay of Spiritual Life.

"That ye being rooted and grounded IN LOVE."
EPHES. iii. 17.

THE precept, however important and needful for the saints of God, has less influence upon their minds than those portions of the divine word that set forth the character and privileges of the children of God. These have a tendency to humble us, to lay us low in the dust, and lead us to great searchings of heart. When we think how God has loved us, and of the debt of love we owe to him, and how in our very best frames we seem to come short of all things that ought to characterise the children of God, the question will often arise—Is it possible that I can be a child of God? Is

it possible that there can be in reality the work of grace going on in my heart? If a child of God, should I think and feel thus? And when we see God's eternal love to us in his beloved Son, we see the great, glorious, and wondrous mystery of that love, written out, as it were, in characters of blood; and the blood sprinkled on our hearts subdues our spirits, bends our wills, purifies our motives, elevates our affections, and draws our hearts to God in a way that no mere precept can effect, for it constrains us to love the very precept, and makes us cry—"Cause me, O Lord, to run in the way of thy commandments with my whole heart."

Oh, my brother, pray earnestly that thou mayest have love in thy heart, and light in thy understanding, to look at the precept through the finished work of the glorified Emmanuel, and to enter upon every duty in the true spirit of filial obedience. Thus thou wilt be enabled the more sweetly and lovingly to say—"Abba, Father." It is as

we contemplate God's love in the cross of Jesus that we grow downward in a deeper humiliation, and upward in higher thoughts of his grace, his blood, his glory, his suffering, and his great salvation.

Though at first sight there appears to be no difficulty in the meaning of these words, yet it does not seem easy to perceive the mind of the Apostle. Most commentators on this passage consider this love, in which believers are said to be "rooted and grounded," to mean that love which they cherish towards the Saviour. It appears to me, however, the great end of the Apostle's desire is to be found in the last clause of the nineteenth verse: "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." For this he bends his "knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The object for which he prayed—that they might be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man," was that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith; that is that they might receive him more fully than they had here-

tofore done; and that as a consequence of Christ dwelling in the heart, they would be more rooted and grounded in his love, and better "able to comprehend with all saints what is the height, and depth, and length, and breadth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge;" that they would know more experimentally, more influentially, his love; and all this leading onward to the great result that they "might be filled with all the fulness of God." It is a precious truth, that the more Christ dwells in our hearts, the more we shall know of his love.

Observe, that the love of Christ is the *ground*, as it were, in which the people of God are to be rooted and grounded. The figure employed by the Apostle is as simple as it is significant—that of a tree deeply striking its roots in a congenial soil. Such is the believer; a plant of the Lord's right hand planting; as saith the prophet, "They shall be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified." Here is the source of the strength

and stability of these trees of righteousness —"rooted and grounded in love." The believer hath strength; but his strength is in Christ — rooted and grounded in him. Their branches may sweep the ground, storms and tempests may rock them to and fro, but the roots of these trees of righteousness are stronger than the foundations of the solid earth — rooted in Christ — "rooted and grounded in love;" and, just as plants take hold of the soil in which they are planted, and draw their nutriment from thence, so is Christ to the believer the source and stay of his spiritual life.

As all believers are in Christ, so by virtue of their union to Christ, they grow up in him, bearing the fruits of righteousness; "for they are made the righteousness of God in him." They not only bear fruit in him, but from him; and this is what the Apostle prayed for, and this is that that marks these trees of the Lord's right hand planting. It is not intellect, it is not clear notions, it is not a creed, it is not

doctrines, it is not party spirit, nor influence, nor distinguished talent, nor high station, nor wealth; but it is their being "trees of righteousness," and bringing forth much fruit, by which they evidence their discipleship.

The metaphor takes in not only the idea of the believer being established firmly, fixedly, rootedly, like a tree grown up, but also like a house established on its foundation, in which a believer is compared to a building, "an habitation of God, through the Spirit."

Thus we think the love of Christ to his people is that in which the believer is to be rooted, and in which he is to be grounded. How does this, my brother, set forth the excellency of the soil in which thou art planted! It is a most costly soil. There may be, and often is, an ardent zeal and fervent love towards an object where there is no opportunity of showing it; but in this case there is a most glorious display of Christ's love.

Look at the *objects* of this love; what is their moral condition? A mass of impurity,

covered with the leprosy of sin. What a mountain of separation seemed to interpose between God and the sinner; it was high as heaven, and deep as hell. For there is not only in the sinner a moral impotence, so that he neither loves nor obeys God, but there is a dreadful activity on his part against God. He is described in God's word as a criminal, a rebel, a traitor in league with Satan against God, hating and setting at nought the authority of God, and the character of God; despising the goodness, the holiness, the justice, and the love of God.

Consider the *end and design* of Christ's love; it is that we may be holy. For this he became incarnate, lived a life of obedience, and died on the cross. He died that He might blot out our sins with his own blood; and all he does is, that he may sanctify and cleanse his people, by the washing of water, by the word, and at last present them to himself "a glorious church; not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy, and without blemish."

The Son of God knew full well the desperate condition and awful depravity of the sinner, and yet he undertook to "save his people from their sins." He knew every sin they would commit in all its abominations; their sins of thought, word, or deed, yea, he perfectly foreknew how they would oppose his own loving designs towards them; yet he did not shrink from undertaking their cause. In everlasting covenant he undertook to be their Prophet, to instruct them; their Priest, to make atonement, and to offer sacrifices for them. For them he offered himself in sacrifice unto God. He is their King, to rule for them, to rule over them and to rule in them. It was for their sakes that he was made flesh, that he divested himself of his glory as God, although not of his Godhead; if he had done that we should have been lost to all eternity. He was a perfect man, having taken upon him our nature; sin only excepted. He was a poor man, a servant; and as a servant he was despised, rejected, abhorred, and set at

nought of men. Yet with the full knowledge of all this he gave himself for us.

It was indeed a *costly* love. He gave not merely his time, his comfort, his reputation, but he gave himself. He gave himself to suffer hunger and thirst, to endure great contradiction of sinners against himself, and to be the victim of base and slanderous accusations. It was not his mere tears, nor groans, nor sighs that he gave, though the Lord Jesus was a "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" if we had gone to his couch we should have seen it wet with his tears—for tears were his meat day and night, and when he prayed it was in agony, for it was "with strong crying and tears."

He gave infinitely more than all this to save us. He did not give angels—the "principalities and powers in the heavenly places"—to redeem his Church, though he could have created as many millions of them in one moment as there are grains of sand upon the sea shore. It was not worlds, that he could have created with a breath, and with

a breath annihilated, that he gave; no, these would have been too low, and poor, and mean. He gave HIMSELF, his whole self! he gave his Deity, he gave his humanity, he gave the whole of his person as God-man; all that was in man, body and soul, to suffer, and all that was in God to merit; he gave a whole obedience to God's holy law; he gave his life a ransom for us, that he might tell his Church through all eternity—"I have loved you better than I loved my life. For your sakes, I have sanctified myself, and was delivered up for you all; I died as a victim in your law-place, and stead."

And oh, beloved, what was there in that death? I do not dwell on its being a reproachful death, nor on its being a lingering death, nor on the agonies of the Sufferer, nor on the empty gaze of the multitude, nor the scornful derision of the chief priests; but I would confine your thoughts to one point—the desertion he endured from his divine Father, which extorted from him the dolorous cry—"My God, my God, why

hast thou forsaken me?" as if he had said, "O righteous Father, I have borne Satan's hatred, I have borne the world's contumely, I have borne the desertion and treachery of my own disciples, but why dost thou forsake me?"

It was a *free* love; in going to the "end of the law for righteousness" he not only by his obedience "magnified the law and made it honourable," but gave himself up to all this awful endurance of its penalty; and all this he gave freely. Never did the water flow from the gushing fountain so freely as his love flowed from his heart; never did the dew fall upon the earth, nor the showers water the parched earth so freely, as he in his own free love, gave this proof of his ineffable affection. It was not a bargain, nor a loan, nor an exchange, but it was a gift, a free gift, an irrevocable gift, an unspeakable gift, an eternal gift. "I lay down my life for the sheep; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again," he says, "no man taketh it from me."

The Jews thought they did—the Romans thought the same; they were the instruments, but he laid it down of himself. In the ancient sacrifices among the heathen, if one victim did but struggle, it was considered an unhappy omen; oh, my brother, if our victim had struggled we had been lost, but "he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; as a sheep before her shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

Oh! what heights and depths of unutterable love are herein manifested, seeing for whose sakes he endured all this wrath of God and the malice and opposition of the Devil! Yea, beloved, he suffered the just for the unjust; for those who never could—who never would — and he knew it — deserve anything at his hands but eternal ruin. "He gave himself for our sins." It was not for our worthiness, not for our duties, not for our excellencies nor our good deeds, but for our bad deeds. Behold how he loved us in giving himself for our sins.

It was indeed *unmerited* love—a love spring-

ing only from himself, for his love is always previous to our love, and is always irrespective of it; for though there is in the heart of Jesus that which loves to behold his own image in his saints, yet his love was previous to all this; "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us."

It is *immutable* love. Oh! let us, beloved, think of that love of his towards us; it is not like ours towards him. How often do we find in many a heart the chill of winter to succeed the warmth of summer! The love of the best of God's saints has its ebbs and flows; but here is no ebbing and flowing—full tide ever; at its height always. He loves his people out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of the power of Satan into the kingdom of God. He loves them into love, loves them into heaven, loves them into God's presence, and will there fill them with his love to all eternity. Here then is a door of unutterable comfort, amidst the desolations of the world. The love of Jesus is not like the world, changeable; not like

the wind, variable; but it is like himself, unchanging and unchangeable. Our love is like the moon, sometimes waxing sometimes waning, but with him there is no variableness nor even the shadow of turning. Like the sun, the climate alters it not; so the variations of time alter not him. He may hide his face, he may send chastisements upon his children, and, blessed be God! he does; yet the very trials with which he exercises us, and the rod by which he corrects us, his frowns as well as his smiles, and his withdrawals as well as his manifestations, are proofs and pledges of his love. He himself says, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." He would have us hate sin, and this his purpose is to make us holy in his love. He would have us holy that we may be happy; and is not this the truest love.

It is a *tender* love; who can declare what that love is. There is the tender love between brother and sister—the still more tender love between parent and child. Does a father

pity his child when others can hardly bear with him, "remembering that he is but dust"—it is the very figure that sets forth the love of Jesus to his people; and yet there is the more exquisitely tender love between husband and wife, by which the love of Jesus is exhibited. "Husbands love your wives," saith the Apostle, "even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." And it is declared that "he that loveth his wife loveth himself;" even so the Lord Jesus in loving the church loveth himself. Language can ascend no higher; sympathy can descend no lower. It is the very height of love; nothing can exceed it. The love of Jesus swallows up all, surpassing all the representations employed; and the loftiest conceptions of mortals or of angelic beings.

XII.

The Stedfast Heart.

"Rooted and grounded in love."—Ephes. iii. 17.

As the tree has a root, and that penetrates into the yielding soil, and takes firm hold of the solid rock, so the Christian has faith; and that faith entering into the love, grace, and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ, has taken firm hold of his heart; his choice is fixed, and he now says, "None but Jesus—none but Jesus."

To be rooted and grounded in love is, to have an *assurance of interest* in that love, founded on a solid basis. Thus to experience Christ's love, and a firm persuasion of interest in it, is a most desirable blessing. It will make our mercies yet sweeter, and our burdens lighter, and prove the best in-

centive to love and serve him with devotedness of heart. If we can trust all our concerns for time and eternity, with full and firm conviction of the love of Christ in giving himself for our sins, we shall realize a support that will not fail us in the hour of our need. Then we shall have daily fellowship with the Father and the Son, and be growing in knowledge, love, and confidence of the Saviour's infinite worth and preciousness.

It is a sad confession to make of great numbers of the Lord's believing family, who have no other hope but in Christ, that they seem to be so little rooted and grounded in him. If they have faith, it is weak and wavering, not fixed on the one solid foundation. Some there are who have no doubt of their interest in him, so long as they travel in pleasant weather; but let a painful providence come upon them, then with poor worm Jacob they are saying, "All these things are against me." Let but an overhanging cloud darken their sky, and they

are full of trouble, and at their wit's end; they can trust him in the summer-time of prosperity, but in the depth of adversity they do not recognize his loving heart and hand. What numbers there are, who, when the Lord has been opening up to them more of the inward conflict than they have previously known and experienced, find themselves what they once did not so fully consider themselves to be. They find within them "another law in their members, warring against the law of their mind, bringing them into captivity to the law of sin and death;" so, "that when they would do good, evil is present with them;" in temptation they find themselves weak, and are ready to take up the words of the Psalmist, and say, "Mine iniquities have gone over my head, and mine eyes shall no more see good;" or with the Apostle Paul, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" How many are there who say, "I have prayed unto the Lord, and he maketh me no

answer!" Yet he is answering them all the time they are complaining. "He is faithful that promiseth," and he still says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

It is *the privilege* of the children of God, to live above these frames and feelings, these fears and faintings. I am, however, far from denying that every true believer is to a certain extent rooted and grounded in Christ—he would be no believer if he were not; but the great majority of the Lord's family are living beneath their privileges, they are far from having their hearts established in the faith and hope of the Gospel, and are soon and easily shaken in their confidence.

The Apostle knew that in the Church at Ephesus there would be many weak and feeble, timid and helpless souls, some young in grace, just entering into the divine life, and others in circumstances of peculiar temptation; while others are compared to trees having no root, whose fruit withereth, without fruit, "twice dead, plucked up by

the root." It is a solemn expression—"having no root." But, beloved, he that has received Christ Jesus the Lord, has root—is rooted in him. Hence the Apostle prays that the Ephesians may be "rooted and grounded in love."

Consider how *indispensable* is this stability in love. Believers have great need to be thus established in the love of Jesus; to be living more by simple faith; to make more use of Jesus; to find the varied occasions of life the very opportunities of going to him. You will see by turning to a parallel passage in the Epistle to the Colossians, the second chapter—"As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him;" not merely in the faith (as in the next clause), but in him, and in his love; not merely in what he has taught, nor in what he has done; but built up in the way of believing in him; it takes in both—the truth itself concerning him, and the believing it firmly, fixedly, rootedly, like a tree striking its roots

into the soil, like a house established on its foundations. "The Lord make you," beloved, "to increase and abound in love, to the end," as the Apostle elsewhere observes, "that he may establish your hearts." The Holy Spirit, in these and other scriptures, lays great stress upon the believer's being rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. From all which we may gather that unfixedness is the attribute of an unregenerate man; for sometimes the ungodly are compared to a house built upon the sand; and others are described as barren trees, having no root.

The *methods* which the Lord takes with his people, in bringing them to experience the blessedness of the privilege are very varied. It is generally a gradual process by which the eternal Spirit bringeth them to this fixedness. Sometimes it is through the medium of a sweet enjoyment of personal interest in this love. Sometimes it is by leading them to evidences, as for instance—"We know that we have passed from death

unto life, because we love the brethren." In some cases the Holy Spirit leads the soul, by a direct act of faith, to lay hold on Christ, as an all-sufficient and suitable Saviour. The Apostle Peter preached Christ to the three thousand; the Jerusalem converts did not talk about their feelings, but they instantly took root in Christ. I cannot but think that the sixteenth verse of the fourth chapter of John's First Epistle sets forth the same truth—"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

All the work of grace is sure to be tried; and the Lord often brings his people into circumstances that try their faith. It is when we are brought on our knees, in earnest, fervent, and believing prayer, for help and deliverance, when we are humbled, and laid low in the dust of abasement, that the Holy Spirit testifies to us the love of Jesus, and enables us to take stronger hold on his atonement, on his perfect righteousness, on the

covenant ordered in all things and sure, and what is better than the covenant, on the God of the covenant.

How strong a hold does it give the soul to realize the love of God in Christ! God is faithful, therefore I am saved; God is unchangeable, therefore I am not consumed. How often does the Holy Spirit strengthen us, by giving us a sanctified remembrance of those times of refreshing we have had, in meditating on the love of Jesus. And when we think of the love and grace manifested to us, and think of the millions around us who have never tasted that he is gracious, then is the inquiry made, Who hath made us to differ? and what have we that we have not received as a gift of love? When we see our old companions, and early associates, numbers of whom have been swept away, and, as far as we know, dead in their sins, we exclaim,

"Why were made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there's room;
While thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

And as we thus think of mercy upon mercy, link upon link, the sanctified memory of them is blessed to our souls, and we are led, with David, to say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name."

Nor is this the only way by which the Holy Spirit strengthens our hold on Christ. In daily communion with him, and in the exercise of faith, we are led out of ourselves into Christ, and are enabled to make the glorious exchange! I take my sin to him, and, in return, he gives me his righteousness; I take my folly, he gives me his wisdom.

See, then, beloved, how *desirable* it is to realize the glorious privilege before us. Oh, when there comes in a suspicion as to the love of Christ, how it unmans a man, how it diminishes our love to Christ, how it weakens our strength! I do not say that a sense of absence is enough to do this, but when there is a suspicion that he loves us not, how it unnerves us, how it leads to

legal principles; how it doubles the weight of an affliction! But if a child of God is "rooted and grounded in love," with every trouble, and in the deepest affliction, he sees Jesus, and his soul is stayed on him.

The believer is not, as we have seen, compared to a stake driven into the earth, but to a tree that takes root downward, and bears fruit upward. A stake may soon be turned up out of the ground. A man with mere notions may easily be talked out of them; but if a man be rooted in Christ, he cannot be easily talked out of his need of Christ; he cannot be talked out of the necessity of salvation by grace; he says, If it were but one prayer, one short prayer, that my salvation depended upon, I must be ruined to all eternity. He sees that the purity of God is so infinitely perfect, that there is sufficient guilt in one short prayer, to bring down upon him the wrath of Almighty God. Seek, then, my brother, to be well established in the immutable, ineffable love of Christ.

It is the indistinctness of their views of the fulness, freeness, and immutability of Christ's love to them, that causes so many of the Lord's people to walk in great darkness and distress of soul; they are looking into themselves for some excellence, instead of looking away from themselves to Christ. Seek, my brother, to have your eyes fixed on Jesus, to know more of him, to have a more abiding conviction of what he is to you, and what you are to him. It was on this account, the Apostle so earnestly implored for the saints at Ephesus, that Christ might dwell in their hearts; not to sojourn for a little season, but that he might make them his permanent residence; not that they might be led just for a moment into an enjoyment of Christ's love, but that, being rooted and grounded in love, they might practically and experimentally know the love of Christ, and be filled with all the fulness of God; that they might be brought to make an entire surrender of their hearts to him.

It is easy to say we must be saved by grace, but how hard a matter it is, entirely to get rid of the secret thought, that the little we have to bring—we know it is but little—may recommend us to the Divine regard. Happy they who are led to say, Well, if I am the greatest sinner that ever existed, I see that Christ is enough for all that I want in the way of strength, of wisdom, of righteousness! Oh, rest then, my brother, in the fulness and freeness of the Saviour's love. Love the pathway of obedience; the sweetest visits are paid there: love the pathway of ordinances. And, oh, remember that it is the Holy Spirit alone that can endear Christ to thy soul; he alone can give thee exalted views of Him.

Beware, then, how you grieve him. If there has been a withdrawment, be honest in seeking out the cause, and abhor it, and forsake it. Remember, too, that if thou art a tree of righteousness, it is that thou shouldest bring forth much fruit. Abiding in Christ, and bringing forth fruit, are

marks of a true believer. The moment a soul is united to Christ, and becomes rooted and grounded in his love, that sapling becomes a leaf-bearer, whose leaves shall not wither; it shall yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and "herein is our Heavenly Father glorified that we bear much fruit." And who shall say how God is glorified by the consistent walking of his people in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, but especially by their fruitfulness.

The Lord takes notice of many things which his people overlook; as Owen says, "He forgetteth the sins they remember, and he remembereth the duties they forget;" he taketh notice of the springing desire; he taketh notice of the lowly mind, abased before him, whilst no one knew it but himself; he taketh notice of the springing well —his own blessed Spirit in the heart— rising up, in holy fervency of spirit, after himself, as the only satisfying good. And in their external fruit too, God loves to be honoured before the world; he will have

them give testimony that the doctrines of grace are "according to godliness;" that as they possess a justification without a work, and while they glory in a righteousness without a work, they shall show it is that alone that leads to all good works; they shall give evidence, that the principle of grace is imperishable, that it mounts upwards, earnestly longing to meet its own level; while it thus aspires after greater conformity to, and communion with, God, it aims to be more useful, more devoted in seeking the welfare of others. The Lord would thus have his people put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, to be reflecting his image, and dispensing blessings and blessedness in the world.

How *blessed, then, is the condition of a true saint of God.* He is stedfast, unmovable, notwithstanding he is exposed to the stormy wind and tempest. Oh, it is blessed for the believer to look off himself, to look out of himself, to look above himself, to Christ; to be firmly rooted and grounded in the love

of Christ. All that he needs he finds in Jesus. Whatever he requires Jesus will give to him. Oh, beloved, whilst thou canst find nothing in thyself to give thee this confidence, this fixedness; yet it is most blessed to know that no soul rooted in Christ shall ever be lost. It is not, believer, what thou thinkest of thyself, but what thou thinkest of Christ; not what dependence thou art placing on thy love to Christ, but what hold thou art taking upon Christ's love to thee.

If thou art thus "rooted and grounded in love," my brother, none can remove thee thence. What! rooted in Christ—rooted and fixed in his everlasting, immutable love—and rooted up! What! secured in the covenant ordered in all things and sure, and rooted up! Who *can* root up those in Christ? Why, the intercession of Jesus secures thee; the indwelling of the Spirit secures thee; the Father's promise secures thee. Who, then, can root thee up? Thou mayest be exposed to storms—they will come—these may shake the tree, but the earth will press

more closely around its roots, and it will strike its fibres yet deeper into the solid earth.

Oh, my brother, thou shalt have reason to bless God for the shaking storm; it has but endeared Christ's love the more to thee; thou dost know more of its preciousness. Thy fixedness in Christ may have been the result of painful discipline; the tree may rock; all around thee may seem to be shaken, but the end designed is thy establishment in the love of Christ.

If we are grounded on the one foundation laid in Zion—the Rock of Ages, if we are settled on the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, and his finished work, every thing else may change, every object around us may vary—how much of our enjoyments may vary, I need not appeal to the hearts of God's saints to answer—but here lies the strength of our confidence, that if through the grace of God our souls are built, not upon ourselves, not upon our experience, not upon our notions, not upon mere opinions, but fully and exclusively upon the love and grace

of the Lord Jesus Christ, heaven and earth may pass away, but the hope thus rooted and grounded, is stedfast, immovable, and shall never pass away, because its foundation is on a rock.

Blessed truth! rejoice in it, O believer! Indwelling Deity is the support of our soul! Truly thou mayest say, "Never were sins more to be deplored than are mine." I so believe that, my brother, that I do not conceive thou knowest a thousandth part of the evil there is in thy sins; but this I tell thee, if God be true, and his word be true, and thou hast been led by the eternal Spirit to build thy hopes upon the Lord Jesus Christ, heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall never pass away. He that buildeth on that rock buildeth for eternity; infinite strength is in it; Omnipotence keeps it; firmer than the solid rock is this basis of thy hope and trust. The storm may beat, and the tempest may howl, and all the changes of season may assail this "Rock of Ages," and the fabric of thy

hopes, built thereon; but inasmuch as the inwrought work, by which thou art led to build thy soul's happiness and hopes upon the Lord Jesus Christ, is of God, and the work itself is God's work, it standeth. And will stand, when all that we exhibit of poor dying mortality shall be seen no more, when thy poor body shall be mouldering in the dust, and thy tongue shall be silent in the grave, and thy voice shall be heard no more, thy soul and its imperishable interests shall be immovably and everlastingly secure, seeing thou art "rooted and grounded in love."

Again do I exhort thee, O believer, to seek more and more this establishment; seek it earnestly; seek to realize and to exemplify that great truth—abiding in Christ. Remember the injunction of our blessed Lord to his disciples—"Continue ye in my love." Continue in a sense of Christ's love to you. Seek more than your necessary food, that "Christ may dwell in your heart by faith." For, blessed be God, in building upon this rock, thou dost build for heaven, and for eternity.

XIII.

The Measureless Love.

"That ye . . . may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height."—EPHES. iii. 11.

IN order that we may have a more comprehensive view of the love of Christ, it is necessary that we should be established and confirmed in the life of faith, and in holy walking and communion with Jesus; to be making constant use of him; to be daily strengthened and supplied by him; to find the various occurrences of life, the very opportunities of receiving out of his fulness, and "grace for grace."

With establishment and fixedness of heart —a being rooted and grounded in Christ's love, there is an increase of holy and spiri-

tual desires, of deep abasement, lowly repentance, supreme love and filial obedience to Christ.

Oh, it is a blessed thing to be established in grace—in the doctrines of grace, in the covenant of grace, in all the outgoings and incomings of grace. The great secret of spiritual life is this—Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, and our dwelling in him, having communion with him, living a life of simple dependence upon him, under deep convictions of our abject poverty, going to him and receiving of his inexhaustible "riches in glory."

In proportion as the child of God is thus established in a sense of personal interest in the person, work, love, and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, so will he be able to comprehend yet more fully his immeasurable and infinite love. As our faith in him increases, a felt union with him becomes stronger and more influential—faith having a uniting power peculiar to itself—by receiving Christ, we incorporate him, just as the

bread we eat becomes part of ourselves. So that, the more realizing our faith is, the more it appreciates Christ, the more able are we to make progress in the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." It must never be lost sight of, that our ability to enter more fully and blessedly into this love of the Lord Jesus, is in consequence of, and in proportion to, our enjoyment of interest in him, and communion with him.

Let us notice what *this part of the Apostle's earnest prayer for the Ephesian believers includes.* In thus desiring that they might comprehend with all saints the fulness of Christ's love, the Apostle is not to be understood as meaning simply, that they might be able to comprehend as much of the love of Christ as all other saints do. There are in the Lord's family many whose faith is very weak and feeble—tried, timid and helpless souls. Some are very young in grace, just entering upon the divine life, who though their eyes have been spiritually enlightened

by the Holy Ghost, yet they see at present, "men as trees walking;" and who, so far from being established and rooted in this love, are full of doubts and fears, and are tossed hither and thither with every wind of doctrine, not distinguishing between faith and sense, or between law and grace.

The work of grace in many Christians is but a begun work. With regard to its principle, it is perfect. Christ is formed in their hearts, the hope of glory; but with regard to the acting of this divine principle, it is at present but very imperfect. Their knowledge of sin, how small is it! How little is seen by them of sin's sinfulness, of the baseness there is in ingratitude; or what abominable deceit and desperate wickedness there is in an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from and distrusting the living God!

And how little knowledge do they possess of Jesus, of the glory of his person, the perfection of his atonement, his perfect righteousness, the sufficiency of his grace,

the tenderness of his sympathy—the sympathy of his nature. He is the "Brother born for adversity," the "Friend that loveth at all times." How little is there of entering into his spirit, imitating his example, of treading in his footsteps, and looking unto him from day to day, from hour to hour. How languidly the pulse of affection and devotion beats toward him. The hands often hang down, and the feeble knees fail them. How slow their progress; not running, nor even walking. Babes are they, and earnestly do they "desire the sincere milk of the word;" how little light is there in the understanding, so that sometimes it seems as if there were scarcely any knowledge at all of the things pertaining to life and godliness. Concerning whom, blessed be God, we can rejoice, for we are "confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in them, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," when they shall be admitted into the entire, full, and everlasting possession and enjoyment of Christ in heaven. Then they shall

know, even as they are known. Until then their little faith shall be increasing in breadth and vigour, when it will be lost in sight; their hope shall disappear in enjoyment, and their prayers shall be turned into songs of everlasting joy and praise.

Some, also, of the Lord's family, who have been longer in the ways of God, are living far beneath their privileges; their faith has become weak, through the indulgence of sense; their spiritual vision has become dim, through looking so much at "the things which are seen;" for whatever induces unspirituality of mind, whatever weans the heart from God, whatever feeds and strengthens our corrupt nature, whatever increases our liability to temptation, doth necessarily weaken our faith, and lessen our ability to "comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

Instead, therefore, of the degree of spiritual knowledge possessed, generally, by the

saints in the Apostle's day, being set up by him as a standard, which he was desirous the saints of Ephesus might attain to and enjoy, I am inclined to think, that this prayer is to be regarded rather as *including all the children of God;* and that it is a token of the largeness and lovingness of the Apostle's heart. He looked abroad and around him; and he longed that all who loved the Lord Jesus might have bestowed on them the same blessings as he desired for these Ephesian saints.

Consider the *terms* in which the extensiveness of this love is expressed by the Apostle. It cannot be doubted that this is a prayer that the Ephesians might have a comprehensive view of the great mystery of love, as displayed in the work of redemption, by virtue of which the Holy Ghost is given to regenerate, sanctify, and comfort all the saints of God. This great mystery is revealed in the Gospel, and is set forth by terms which convey to our minds every possible idea of its extent and perfection.

It was the Apostle's desire, that they might go on increasing in acquaintance with this great and glorious subject, throughout the countless ages of an eternal world.

In attempting a survey of this measureless love, let us notice what is included in the expression, "*the breadth.*" It takes in the elect of God in all ages, and in all places. The Jews considered none but themselves as the objects of the Divine regard; but the Apostle had outgrown his Jewish prejudices, and took a comprehensive glance of the objects and extent of redeeming love. How broad must be that love that includes the whole elect family of God, all who have believed, all who do believe, all who shall believe, all who were given to the Son of God by the Father, all for whom he became incarnate, all for whom he lived, all for whom he died, all for whom he still lives; sinners of every grade, of every degree, of every state and condition, the lowest and the vilest; it takes in all the faithful in Christ Jesus; believers of every grade, the weakest as well

as the strongest; those who are as frail as the "bruised reed," and as full of infirmity as the "smoking flax;" those who have made much progress heavenward, and those whose faces and feet are but just turned toward Mount Zion.

So exceeding broad is this love, that it not only includes all the individuals who belong to the one "family in heaven and earth," but it takes in also all their circumstances. O believer, the eye of infinite love sees thee in all thy trials and temptations, under all thy doubts and fears, when thou dost wander away from Jesus, and when thou dost return unto the Lord thy God, with weeping and with supplication. Thy Father sees all thy weakness and thy wants. His heart of love yearns over thee; and while he pities, he pardons all thy manifold sins and transgressions. His hand of love lays thee low in the dust, and lifts thee up; it upholds, preserves, protects, and strengthens thy soul. It takes in the temptations incident to which the youngest is liable, as well

as the toils, and the harassing and perplexing affairs of middle life, together with the weaknesses, infirmities and trials of declining age. It comprehends all the believer's spiritual and all his temporal trials; circumstances the most minute, as well as those of greater magnitude.

It is spoken of by its *"length;"* its influence extending from one eternity to another. As its goings forth have been from everlasting, so will its power be displayed until "all Israel shall be saved with an everlasting salvation." It comprehends the whole of our being, our bodies, our souls; it takes in our *unconverted* being, he saw us ruined in the fall of our first parents, yet he loved us; he saw us when we were lying in our sins, and in our blood; when we were dead in trespasses and sins; even when we were enemies, he loved us, and gave himself for us; when we were going farther and farther from God and righteousness, when following a multitude to do evil, in the maddest of our career, his love set limits to our

sinning; he said unto us—"Hitherto shalt thou go, but no further."

It takes in our *converted* being. It was in the exercise of his gracious and sovereign love that he called us "out of darkness into his marvellous light." Oh, what love was herein displayed; to be called out of bondage into liberty, out of poverty into affluence, out of wretchedness and misery into happiness, from guilt and condemnation into justification and pardon, from sin to holiness, from earth with its sins and sorrows, from a deserved hell to heaven! His love is displayed in preserving and keeping us from the power and policy of Satan, and in upholding us in his paths, so that our footsteps slip not. How this evidences the everlasting arms, the sympathy, the kindness, the gentleness, and omnipotence of his love.

The manifestations of his love and grace are displayed in restoring the souls of his servants, when, like David, they have sinned against him. Oh, what a look of love was that,

when the Lord turned and looked upon Peter, after his awful fall! While there was reproof and indignation in it—this he cast against his sin—there was in it the tenderest love to the sinner. He looked upon him as one given to him by the Father. He saw the new principle within him struggling with inbred corruptions. Oh, what power was there in that loving look! It brake Peter's heart; it restored him to repentance. He went out and wept bitterly.

Oh, beloved, when the Saviour's love is displayed towards a backslider, it worketh "repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of." It leads the soul to Jesus, and to the joys of his salvation, and issues in eternal life. And nothing is so powerful in restoring the backslider to penitence and hope as a manifestation of Christ's love to his soul. By having the Saviour's precious blood applied to his conscience, he obtains peace within; he looks up to God as his portion, and hates sin, because he sees God as a sin-forgiving God.

Oh, let us be ever watchful against the approaches of sin; and when sin hath power over us, let us remember that Christ loveth us; and let us take our sin, in deep repentance and simple faith, to him who alone can restore us to himself, and to the comfort of hope; to him whose loving look can break and melt these hearts of stone.

And "the love of Christ," saith the Apostle, "constraineth us." It will constrain us to love him, and to trust our souls, and all our concerns, in his hands; to depend on his mediation; to renounce all other lords for him, and to yield our hearts unto him; to humble our souls before him; to hate and forsake all evil; to devote ourselves to his service; to follow his example; to seek conformity to him; to love all his people, and to seek the prosperity of his cause, and the increase of his kingdom. It will also constrain us to long after his immediate presence, and cause us to desire to depart, that we may be with him, and be like him, evermore.

This love of Christ, in its length, extends to the close of our life of faith on earth, and through all the enjoyments and glories of eternal life.

Do we look at its *"depth."* It is unfathomable; it is a bottomless abyss, swallowing up every sin. Look at the depths of pollution into which sin hath brought us; every faculty of the mind is debased, every member of the body is defiled by sin. Look at the depth of guilt into which sin has sunk us. If all the angels in heaven had attempted to make satisfaction for one sin, they could not have done it. The redemption of Christ descends to the deepest depths of degradation, and miserable sinners are rescued by it from the lowest hell. He came to open the prison to them that are bound, and he plucks them as brands out of the fire. Look at the depth of misery into which sin hath plunged us; the misery of a state of alienation from God, and of enmity and rebellion to the best of Beings. And yet from all this, his love has delivered us.

Oh, what an amazing and wonderful love!

"Plunged in a gulf of dark despair,
We wretched sinners lay,
Without one cheerful beam of hope,
Or spark of glimmering day.

"With pitying eyes the Prince of Grace
Beheld our helpless grief;
He saw, and, O, amazing love!
He ran to our relief."

But, oh, what a depth of misery it brought him into! Here is Divinity stooping to human guilt and wretchedness, taking it upon himself. Look at him in helpless infancy, cradled in a manger at Bethlehem, because there was no room for him in the inn. Look at him in the garden of Gethsemane, groaning beneath the burden of our guilt; for it pleased the Father to put him to grief, and to lay upon him the iniquities of us all. But look to Calvary, and see him there, numbered with transgressors, stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, making his soul an offering for sin. How low he stooped! What depths of condescension! He "made himself of no reputa-

tion, but took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

"He stoop'd beneath our heavy load,
To raise us to a throne;
There's ne'er a gift his hand bestow'd,
But cost his heart a groan."

But, beloved, contemplate the *"height"* of the Saviour's love. Where is he now? He is at the right hand of the Majesty on high. What is he doing there? He has entered into heaven for us. Oh, who can scale the heights of this mystery of love? Who can tell what heights of glory the saints shall be exalted to, or to what dignity and blessedness they shall ere long ascend? "Beloved, it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but when He shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." For this he prayed to his Divine Father when he was upon earth: "Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

XIV.

The Transcendent Knowledge.

"And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."—EPHES. iii. 19.

WE have already had occasion to notice and admire the vastness of conception with which the Holy Spirit filled the mind of the Apostle, as well as the loftiness of expression employed by him in setting forth the great and glorious privileges belonging to the Church of God, and in honouring and magnifying the love and grace of his beloved Lord, both in this and the following Epistle. In this verse we have another exemplification of the glorious terms in which he is wont to describe and commend the Saviour's

love. He here speaks of that love as passing knowledge.

Oh, how much did he experimentally know of the love and grace of Christ, of the glory of his person, of the completeness of his work, and of the perfection of his righteousness! How extensive his travels, how exhausting his labours, and ardent his zeal in making known the Saviour's love to others! Yet the Apostle was most fervent in his desires, and diligent in his efforts, to acquire a more intimate acquaintance with, and a fuller knowledge of, this love; and he desired this as well on his own account as that others might find all their happiness springing from this inexhaustible source. He seemed, in fact, to have concentrated all his desires in this one object and aim—"that I may know him." Nothing would satisfy his own mind but this, and this distinguished mercy he most earnestly sought on behalf of others. This is his prayer for the saints at Ephesus—that they may "know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

It is the greatness of Christ's love to his people that is here so highly commended by the Apostle; and truly, if we consider the *origin* of Christ's love, it surpasses all knowledge. If, beloved, we form a right estimate of the love Christ hath toward us, we must trace the stream back to its source—the heart of God himself. How amazing is that love which is its own spring, and is caused by nothing seen or foreseen in the objects on whom it is placed! Oh, how wonderful is this love which led God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, who possessed all the uncreated and essential glories of Jehovah, to undertake from all eternity the great work of our redemption!

If, therefore, we consider the *antiquity* of this love, it surpasses knowledge. Oh, I do love to contemplate the antiquity of Christ's love! Hence we read of the Lord Jesus Christ fixing his love upon and delighting in his people, from everlasting; as it is set forth in the eighth chapter of the Book of Proverbs, from the twenty-second to the

thirty-first verse. So intent was the Son of God in giving expression to, and in carrying into effect, the purposes and engagements of his love, that he anticipated, as it were, the period of his Advent, and by the mouth of his servant David announced it, saying, "Lo, I come; I delight to do thy will, O my God."

Thus, then, if we consider the essential dignity and glory of the Son of God, and the meanness of his creatures, is it not an amazing thought, that the happiness or misery of mean, unworthy, guilty wretches like ourselves, should so interest him, as that he should have "remembered us in our low estate," and that his "delight" should be in our salvation?

The love of Christ is beforehand with his people's love to him. If "we love him," it is "because he first loved us." His love precedes our love, our faith, our godly sorrow, our fear, our hope, our humility; yea, before we had any knowledge or experience of divine and spiritual things. Oh,

there is a deep sound in this string; may it vibrate in our hearts! Oh! that love which pitied us when we were "enemies to him by wicked works," and "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Such love as this, how it passeth all knowledge! Who can comprehend it? Angels cannot, saints cannot; and it will engage all holy minds through everlasting ages, and still it will baffle and confound all the powers of saints and seraphs to understand its full import and blessedness.

If we look at the *various displays* of Christ's love, how far it surpasses all our highest conceptions! Oh, what a stupendous mystery is there in the love of Christ, as displayed in *his becoming incarnate*, that God should unite himself to our nature! "God was manifest in the flesh." We utter these great and glorious truths with our lips; we believe them with our hearts; we know, experimentally, to some extent, their exceeding preciousness; yet there is in them a depth that "passeth knowledge."

When we see in Jesus the union of these two natures together—weakness and omnipotence—we see him as man upholden by God, and as God upholding all things. As man, eating and drinking, and weary and worn—just as you and I, beloved, often are—and yet as God the Preserver of all beings, all creation, human, angelic, and animal. As man we see him finite; as Jehovah infinite. As man mutable; as Jehovah immutable. Oh, beloved, there is something so vast, so marvellous, and, in some of its bearings, so incomprehensible in this manifestation of the Saviour's love, that well might the Apostle exclaim, "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh."

Oh, what a glorious mystery, and what wonderful unfoldings of love are here; and it is essential to our soul's safety and comfort that we have an experimental knowledge of it. There are times and seasons when the Spirit of God opens a man's heart to himself, and causes him to see

the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, in a measure, of what that sin is that he has within him; when he feels most deeply, that if he had not that which is infinite, immutable, and eternal, to stand in before the infinite and eternal God, he must perish for ever; he feels that all confidence short of this would be a resting-place of sand; he feels all hope elsewhere placed, to be but a broken reed, only piercing the hand that leans on it. No creature can give him a foundation for the sole of his foot; but God in his nature *can*. And this is all his salvation, all his desire, and all his glory.

Oh, who can describe or comprehend the wonderful *condescension of the Saviour's love*, or what that humiliation is to which Jesus submitted in taking upon him our nature at all? Here all language, all thought, fails; it surpasseth all knowledge. If, my brother, we are called to descend a little for Christ, if we are called to bear contempt and reproach for Christ, we know

full well what that is, we can quite understand that; but who can describe what depth of meaning is wrapped up in that statement of the Apostle, in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians, from the sixth verse to the eighth—"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross?" Such humiliation as this, beloved, is far beyond our power of expression, or conception—that *God* should stoop to our nature. Oh, the unfathomable depth of this amazing love! Well might the Apostle describe this mystery of love and grace as that which passeth all knowledge.

But yet there seems in *the sufferings and death of our Lord,* that which sets forth his love in a still more wonderful manner. We believe that the Lord Jesus in everlasting

covenant engaged to become our Surety, our Goel, our Kinsman and Redeemer; and that, in the fulness of time, he stood forth in this character on behalf of his people; that for them he was the "end of the law for righteousness"; and that he suffered and died in their law place and stead. Now there is something in this that "passeth knowledge." That he should die at all is most wonderful; and that he should die to make atonement for our sins is still more wonderful, when we think what sin is, and what are its elements. And when we consider, too, what awfulness there is in the wrath of a holy and righteous God; how infinite and eternal the misery which the Church ought and must have endured—and which He did endure in his own Person—how utterly unable are we to speak of this love!

He "knew no sin," and yet he died as if he had been himself the sinner; for sin was as much laid to his charge, and as much imputed to him, and placed to his account, as if he had himself committed

it: so close is the communion between the great Surety-Head and the Church for which he bare it. Now that he should die for sinners, for the ungodly, for the unrighteous, for the rebellious, for the undeserving, and the hell-deserving; oh, how wonderful is this! And yet he did suffer and endure all the wrath our sins had incurred, of his own free consent. His suffering was purely voluntarily; he was not wrought upon by any one thus to love us, it sprang out of his heart—just as the light springs from the sun, just as water springs from the fountain. "I lay down my life of myself." "No man taketh it from me." "He gave himself for us." And when we consider that the death he died was an accursed death, a protracted death; when we see all that misery and wrath in it, which was involved in the curse of Almighty God, oh, how this love of Christ "passeth knowledge!"

Nor will our wonder cease, or become less, if we further contemplate the love of Christ as it is *manifested on behalf of his*

people now he is in heaven. He is at the right hand of God, carrying on his great work of intercession. He is there pleading that work which he finished on Calvary; and gives to it all the glories of his own glorious person. And there he is as the Representative of his Church, having taken possession of heaven for us, standing in the presence of God for us, standing on the right hand of God, as if we ourselves were there, and seen in him when he sprinkles the mercy-seat with his own blood. Oh, beloved, he did not cease to love us when he gave himself a ransom for us; "for whom he loved, he loveth unto the end." The frequent interviews he had with his disciples after his resurrection, showed how greatly he loved them; and when he left them, it was with a benediction of love. Nor does he love his people less now he hath ascended to his throne of glory. How refreshing is the thought, that he ever liveth to carry into effect the purposes of his love, in bringing to everlasting glory all the objects of his

love, by representing their persons, and in receiving for them, and bestowing upon them, all the blessings of grace and glory.

It was with this glorious intercession in view, that the Apostle John wrote that blessed and encouraging truth—"If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father;" an Advocate who will answer all accusations, clear us from all charges of guilt, and procure for us all needful grace and help; preserve us in all times of temptation, and protect us from the power and malice of our great enemy, who desires to have us that he may sift us as wheat; but He intercedes for us, that our faith fail not.

Oh, beloved, could you see what is carried on in heaven at this moment, you would see the glory Stephen saw; you would behold the Son of God at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as your interceding High Priest, sprinkling the mercy-seat with his own blood for your soul's safety and consolation. "Seeing then that we have a great High

Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

And when, my brother, we think of the *blessed effects and results* flowing to *us* from this love, and consider how it is displayed in *conversion,* in the pardon of our sins, in the calling us out of darkness into God's marvellous light, in putting his fear in our hearts, and in causing us to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"—for it is on account of what this love hath done, and is doing for us, that we are perfectly, fully, and eternally forgiven all our manifold sins and transgressions; that we are fully and for ever justified, and "accepted in the Beloved;" that "there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who

walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" and that we shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation—oh, how fully doth it appear that the wondrous love that hath thus been manifested toward us "passeth knowledge!"

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." For the Saviour's love will never be fully displayed, or the travail of his soul be satisfied, until all his people are with him in glory. Oh, how passing all knowledge will his love be, when it will there be realized by all his believing family; when he shall come in all the glory of his Father, to receive his betrothed and ransomed bride; when the mystical union now subsisting between Christ and his people shall be solemnized before an assembled universe. Then will it be more clearly seen, and fully known and realized. And how inconceivably great, unspeakably blessed, and everlastingly glorious, will the full

enjoyment of this love be to the saints in glory, when they are

> "Far from a world of grief and sin,
> With God eternally shut in."

But until then the saints of God will be continually receiving fresh manifestations of this love; nor will these renewed tokens of his affection be less astonishing to those who are its distinguished and favoured objects.

Not only do we owe the beginning of the work of grace in conversion to this wonderful love, but to it we are indebted for our *continuance and progress in the paths of holiness and peace.* It is alone from this never-failing source the saints of God receive their daily, hourly, and momentary supplies of the life-giving Spirit. From it we obtain the grace which enables us to fight with sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil. For sinful, erring, weak creatures like ourselves, who at the end of every day feel constrained to acknowledge, that of sinners we are the chief, while of saints we are the

least; and when others may esteem and commend us the most, feel that the lowest place in the dust belongs to us—for creatures so worthless as ourselves, to be so favoured, and to be enabled to stand in the evil day, when trials and temptations set in against us, and also to plead the righteousness of God's dear Son, as our ground of acceptance with a holy and righteous God, oh, there is a greatness and blessedness in this privilege which is truly wonderful—a privilege that we owe entirely and exclusively to "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

And again, for a sinful worm to become "the temple of the Holy Ghost;" as saith God, "I will put my Spirit within them"—oh, who that doth rightly appreciate the transforming influences of the indwelling Deity, but is forced to admit that love like this "passeth knowledge;" for to it alone is the astonishing fact to be ascribed that God will not only dwell with man upon the earth, but that He will take up his abode

in those who are of a "contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

How often do we find our hands hanging down instead of being lifted up, and feel that we have no strength to uphold ourselves for a single moment, yet how blessed is the thought, that we receive from this source the grace that stirs us up to wait upon God, and thus our inner man is renewed day by day, and we are thereby enabled to go on our way rejoicing. It is thus our loving and beloved Lord meets us in our every difficulty, supplies our minutest wants, listens to all our detail of domestic, personal, bodily, and spiritual trials, for there is with him an abundance of power, and quite as great an abundance of love.

Hence, too, it is that backsliders are recovered out of the snares of Satan, of sin, and the world, and restored to their former state of spiritual feeling and enjoyment? Oh, beloved, it may be that it is with thee as with

the members of the Galatian Church—thou "didst run well;" there was a time when there was secret communion between thy soul and God. It may not be so with thee now; thou mayest have been for a long time far off, and thou knowest it; thou tellest no one of it, but thou knowest it. Oh, nothing but this love can restore thy soul to its former state of spirituality and zeal, or restore unto thee the joys of God's salvation. Is thine heart melted? is thy spirit subdued? art thou coming in poverty of soul to the cross of the Son of God? Oh, whence has this influence come which has changed thy course, and which has prevailed over thy old nature? Comes it not from the love which is stronger than death, and which no waters can quench? Amazing love! to be so patient, forbearing, and long-suffering under provocations; a love over-leaping all the mountains of separation, and prevailing over all obstacles. It passeth knowledge.

Drawn by these cords of love to Jesus,

believers are *sanctified.* How many of the Lord's people have been brought to this! They have resolved and prayed, and prayed and watched; but, alas! how have they been foiled in their efforts. It is only when the eye of their faith has been fastened by the Spirit upon Jesus, they have been successful in overcoming evil. Oh, have we not found more power to subdue sin within us, and stronger motives to "abstain from the appearance of evil," in that simple view of him, than in all our efforts and prayerfulness, important as these are, binding as they are upon us, and not on any account to be left undone. Yet in that simple view of Jesus, we have learned the truth that—"Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory."

But if the effect of this faith's view of Christ, and of the love he has towards us, has been thus elevating, humbling, purifying, exalting, and drawing us out of self, and leading us up to God, what a moment will

that be when, seeing him, "we shall be like him." It seems as if the sight of our loving Saviour did at once bring with it the most entire, complete, and blessed perfection of being; the soul perfectly purified, the body perfectly glorified, and dwelling in the immediate presence of Christ. How it "passeth knowledge!"

Heaven is full of this love. There the saints of God are rejoicing in the participation of all its glorious and all-satisfying blessings. Oh, one may sip refreshment from the overflowing fountain; but who is able to trace its windings in the bowels of the earth? Who can follow it to its source, and tell whence it came? Yet the water is not the less sweet to the taste. We may traverse the ocean, and yet not be able to fathom its depths. Oh, beloved, if these things around us are incomprehensible, how much more doth the love of Christ surpass all knowledge.

However paradoxical this prayer may appear to be—that we might know that

which passeth knowledge, and comprehend that which is incomprehensible, or whatever seeming contradiction there may be in it, the meaning of the Apostle is obvious, and easy to be understood. While, beloved, the love of Christ passeth all understanding; while that which is infinite in its own nature cannot be fully known by finite creatures, however highly gifted, the Apostle felt exceedingly desirous that the saints of God to whom he wrote, might possess such a knowledge of it as is attainable. What cannot be at all known by the unrenewed mind, can, to some extent, be discerned by all who are truly enlightened by the Spirit of God. The spiritual perception of any truth is most precious, and ought greatly to be prized. It is not enough that we have a theoretical knowledge of these important subjects, or a dry, notional acquaintance with the facts of Christ's love, and the benefits which it confers, for, however accurate in its outline that knowledge may be, its possessor may after all be in "the gall of

bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity." A more awful condition, or a more solemn truth cannot be stated or described, than that referred to by the Apostle Peter, in his Second Epistle, the second chapter, and the twentieth and twenty-first verses—"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

The knowledge, therefore, that the Apostle prayed for on behalf of this people, was *a real, personal, experimental, and sanctifying acquaintance with, and an enjoyment of, the Saviour's love.* What we may not be able fully and perfectly to understand, we may yet know savingly; hence the Apostle desired for this people, that they might be able with himself to say—"Who loved me

and gave himself for me." Not merely did he desire that they might be convinced of its reality, and admire its intrinsic excellence, but that they might so know it, as sensibly to enjoy its sweet and saving benefits. Oh, how desirable is it to possess such a knowledge of Christ's love to us as shall comfort our hearts in all times of distress, and quicken our desires after still higher attainments in the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord!

This theme is full of *holy consolation* to the tried family of God; many of whom are often ready to say—"My trials are greater than I can bear; my stroke is heavier than my groaning." My situation renders me unknown. "No man careth for my soul." Suppose, my brother, it should be as thou dost imagine, what of that, so long as Jesus knows both thee and all thy sorrows and griefs; he has not only this knowledge of thee, but he tenderly loves thee; he says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" "thou shalt never be forgotten by me." Oh,

is not the free, full, and immutable love of thine Infinite, thine Eternal, thine Almighty Saviour enough for thee?

It is also full of *instruction;* it more than intimates to us that every real, needed, and spiritual mercy, which we receive from day to day, is solely to be ascribed to the Saviour's love. Oh, how backward are we to receive and to acknowledge this truth! If the sermon be sweet, and soothing, and adapted to our present exercise of mind; if in prayer we find relief from the burdens which press upon our spirits; if the heart be broken, and the spirit contrite and penitent; if our faith takes hold of the covenant, and pleads it with humble and assured confidence; if our hope takes hold of that which is within the veil; we ought ever to remember that these blessed states of experience all flow to us through the love of Christ.

Moreover, beloved, thou art taught by this subject, that all the roughness of thy way, as well as all thy pleasant paths; all thy trials, as well as thy comforts; all thy

temptations and thy tears; while they all adapt thee to him, have but one voice; they urge thee to seek to "comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

But, into what *deep abasement of spirit* ought this subject to lead us. Here is the immeasurable, inconceivable love of Christ to us. What are the dimensions of our love to him? He was not ashamed of our cause, and is not ashamed to call us brethren; but how often have we been ashamed of him, and of his cause. His love to us is a fruitful love; but, alas! when we look back on our past days, we too much resemble the withered fig tree. Blessed be God, it is not wholly so; we are not entirely without love to him; there are some things which remain, although they oftentimes appear ready to die. May these be strengthened and greatly multiplied in us, so that we may love him more ardently, and serve him to better purpose.

Oh, when we measure our love by the love Christ hath manifested toward us, there is but one place for us; it is in the lowest dust of abasement before God.

This subject has in it *the elements of all holiness.* What a holy and powerful stimulant is here, to induce us to make a surrender of our souls to him who hath loved us, and given himself for us! By the mercies of God, we are enjoined to present ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, unto him, which is our reasonable service. Whatever there is of love, whatever of hope, of obedience, of careful walking, of watchfulness unto prayer, of making conscience of one's actions, of secret communion with God, it is all involved in this real, personal, experimental knowledge of Christ's love; the more we contemplate it, and live upon it, and exemplify it, the more we shall live above the world, its poor dying vanities, and its momentary cares; casting our burdens upon him who can and who will sustain us. Are we cowards, there is enough in this love to make us brave. Are

we weak, it will nerve us with strength. If any man lack wisdom, there is enough in this love to make us wise, in reference to our way, work, and warfare, and wise unto eternal salvation.

Oh, what a *uniting* influence there is in a knowledge of Christ's love; it induces us to look with the eye of affection upon the whole Church of God, who are loved with the same love, redeemed by the same blood, washed in the same fountain, justified by the same righteousness, and predestinated to the same glory. How this thought should endear all the members of the Lord's family the one to the other. If Christ has loved us, how ought we to love one another; how it should teach us to bear and forbear with, and to forgive an offending brother!

Such a knowledge will tend greatly to *reconcile our minds to the discipline of love.* Christ himself saith, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." Let us not, beloved, quarrel with the way in which He manifests his love toward us.

We are, I am aware, sometimes afraid lest his rod should fall heavily upon us. When we pray that he would give us an earnest desire after himself, as the chief good, and that we may be weaned from earth and creature comforts, we are afraid lest he should take away some beloved Isaac; and when we pray that he would cause us to bring forth more of the fruits of righteousness, we tremble lest the knife should sever some tender tie; and when we ask him to display his love, by bringing health and cure into our souls, we shrink when the lancet enters some imposthume, lest it should penetrate too deep into our hearts. Oh, let us not shrink from that tender hand which wounds to heal; but let us submit ourselves to his loving discipline, though it may sometimes seem severe, knowing that the love of Christ, in whatever form it is displayed, can only intend our best our highest good.

In conclusion. Be thankful, my brother, for the least measure of this experimental

knowledge of Christ's love; but, at the same time, pray for more comprehensive views of this transcendent theme. They know most of the Saviour's love, who are most diligent in the use of all means whereby this may be acquired; as it is written—"Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." Live much in the prospect of enjoying his presence in glory everlasting. Oh, how unspeakably glorious the condition of those who, after possessing some knowledge of Christ's love on earth, are looking forward to, and living for, the blessed period when they shall know even as they are known, and be for ever with the Lord! This honour and this blessedness have all his saints.

XV.

The Sublime Request.

"That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."
EPHES. iii. 19.

WE have now come to the Apostle's last petition on behalf of the Ephesian believers. How vast, how comprehensive is this sublime request. It was to this point that all his previous petitions tended. For when the Apostle prayed that the members of this Church "might be strengthened with might by the Divine Spirit in their inner man," and that "Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith," it was that they might

attain to this height of blessedness—"filled with all the fulness of God." And not only did these several comprehensive supplications tend to this grand result, but the blessings herein sought, constituted the chief means of producing it. It is not, my brother, sufficient to write or preach about Christ; it is not only necessary that we should be led to Christ, and have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, but it is also indispensable that we should be led by this process, through Christ, to the God of all grace.

Let us inquire what is *included in this prayer* of the Apostle. It is nothing less than that the vast and inexhaustible fulness of the eternal God may supply the emptiness of man. "Who by searching can find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection?" And yet the Apostle prayed that this people "might be filled with all the fulness of God." Did the holy Apostle desire that they might be filled with infinity? Nay, beloved, he knew that even in his glorified state, the believer can never rise higher than a creature of

God; and, therefore, is placed at an infinitely impassable distance from the eternal, incomprehensible, all-comprehending, self-existent, self-sufficient, and all-filling Jehovah. He did not, therefore, pray that the *essential* fulness of God might be communicated to them, nor had he in his mind the thought that the glorious attributes of Jehovah could be possessed by any creature, however highly endowed. This were to desire an utter impossibility, and would betray gross impiety and folly so to pray for it.

Neither did the Apostle here pray that the *communicable* fulness there is in Christ might dwell in them. "It hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell" in his Son, and not in either angel or saint, nor yet in the Church; but he prayed that we might be receiving out of the Saviour's fulness, grace to help in every time of need. And it is thus ordered, that we might be as dependent on Him at the last as at the first. It is, therefore, a *derivative* fulness, a further supply of spiritual good from God

through Christ, that is the object of the Apostle's prayerful solicitude.

In this arrangement we discover both the wisdom and the mercy of God; for could the believer find in himself a fulness, he would have that in which he could glory, and would lose sight of the ONE grand object of glory; for it is written—"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." He prayed not that the fulness might dwell in them, but they might be filled out of that fulness. Neither does the Apostle merely pray that they might receive of this fulness, but that they might be *filled* with it; not only that they should be partakers of a small portion of it, but that they should have bestowed upon them an abundance of the heavenly grace.

It is thus spoken of as "ALL the fulness," because it comprises all the gifts and graces which are indispensable to all the members of the one family, during their earthly pilgrimage; and which will constitute all their blessedness in the world of glory, to

which they are, moment by moment, progressing. The Apostle is therefore to be understood as thus praying in behalf of the Ephesian saints, that they might be receiving *the largest possible communications of divine grace in their souls.* The prayer includes such a measure of spiritual blessings, as shall be most beneficial to them; that every faculty of the believer's soul might be under a holy and heavenly influence; that the mind might be full of holy contemplations of God, the affections filled with ardent love to the things of God; that the will might be brought into complete submission to, and acquiescence with, the will of our Heavenly Father; so that, indeed, they might be "thoroughly furnished unto every good work," and "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God."

In being thus "filled with all the fulness of God," is included a being FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT; hence the Apostle's exhortation, in

the fifth chapter, the eighteenth verse: "Be filled with the Spirit." There is in this expression, that which implies, the power of the Spirit to fill the soul of man. We shall, therefore, point out some of the blessings that result from this communication of the "fulness of the Spirit," in all his holy influences, to our souls.

First of all, let us look at Him as the Spirit of *wisdom and revelation*—as you may read in the first chapter of this Epistle, and the seventeenth verse. It is our mercy to know, that all the Lord's people, all who are called by his grace, have received the Spirit of grace. While the believer knows something of himself, something of Christ, something of God in Christ, he knows enough of himself to know that he has no confidence in his own righteousness, nor in his own doings, nor in his own strength, nor in his own excellency. There may be some wisdom, there may be real wisdom; but how little depth of wisdom is there concerning the Lord Jesus! In the fifth

chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we see this: "For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

But if a believer is filled with the Spirit of wisdom, he has received large communications of the Spirit of revelation; he sees Christ; he knows Christ; he sees such beauty in the Son of God, such incomparable majesty in the incarnate One, such fulness of grace in him, such completeness in his work, such glory in his righteousness, such tenderness in his sympathy, such condescension in his grace, that he seems a new man; the same man, yet another man; he is now "filled with the Spirit" of wisdom. When I say "filled," I know it is but in measure, I know it is but in degree; for every thing here is but a step to another and a higher position; it is but the beginning

of what shall be. Compared with what the believer was before, he is "a new creature." Look at the Apostle Peter before the day of Pentecost. How dark his perception of the atonement, how little did he see of what Jesus came into the world for! You may talk with some men, many of whom are truly converted to God, yet Christ is in the back ground, you see, or hear, so little of him. They talk of God; there is something about their creed that is so Jewish; they speak so much more of God, than of God in Christ. There is so little of the great work of the incarnate One, so little of realizing the strength of the covenant "ordered in all things and sure." Oh, beloved, to be filled with the Spirit of wisdom is the highest wisdom.

But let us look at the subject in another point of view. I find in the eleventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and the twenty-fourth verse, it is said of Barnabas, "he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith." So, when we

are filled with the Holy Ghost, we are *filled with faith.* Filled with faith! Ah, who can fully describe the blessedness of being filled with faith? How unspeakably blessed it is, beloved, to see every thing in the light of God's countenance; to see everything in the light of a Saviour's fulness; to see things contrary, and things pleasant, and to trace them up to the same source; still to be able to rise above oneself, still to repose on the God that changes not, still to find our rest in the cross of the incarnate One, still to rise above our fears and tears, and our unrighteousness, and our ignorance, and our folly, and our sin, and to realize our oneness with Christ, who is one with God.

In the sixth chapter of Acts, and the eighth verse, we find Stephen, who in the third verse is said to be "full of the Holy Ghost," described in this eighth verse as being "*full of power.*" I do not deny that there was something extraordinary in the communication of power to these good and holy men; but I believe there was that

which all the saints of God possess in common with them, and what they ought to have in common with them, and what they do realize in common with them, although differing in measure and degree.

Here is a child of God; he prays, but with how little power; he converses, it is with little power; he preaches, it is with little power and unction. But he is brought into some deep trouble; he is brought into some deep emergency; he is, perhaps, stripped of all; he is brought to the dust; he is brought to his knees; he is brought to the throne of grace; he is emptied of self; he is stripped of his vain confidence; and he comes out of the trial, like David out of the cave of Adullam, and seems to carry all before him. You see the same man who seemed to have had no energy, now his power subdues you; there is power in his conversation that he never had before. The same truths are uttered that you have heard from his lips, it may be, hundreds of times before, powerlessly; now they come with power.

Why is this? He is filled with the Holy Ghost. We see this man having strength over his corruptions; though in himself he is weak, yet, with the Apostle, he can say, "I can do all things, through Christ which strengtheneth me"; and therefore it is that we find the Apostle speaking elsewhere of "the Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

Oh, who can declare what that power is, and what the might of that love which passeth knowledge is, and what it will constrain thee to when it is shed abroad in thy heart, and in my heart, by the Holy Ghost? If you talk with a man in whom the Spirit dwells; he seems as an angel sent down from heaven to you. You converse with him; he is the means of lifting you up from earth to heaven; he is the means of soothing you in your deep affliction, of weaning you from earth, making you to hate sin, and to long after an entire dedication of the soul to God.

There is one point we ought not to overlook; it is the blessing of an advance in

sanctity, of being filled with the *Spirit of holiness*. In the second chapter of the Acts, I see the man who thus addressed those around him:—"Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved by God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs; which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Who is this? What! is this the timid, Christ-denying Peter? What! is this the man that ran from the first appearance of persecution, who now puts his foot on his life, tramples on his own character, willing to be esteemed the vilest? Is this the man who stands foremost? Do you ask what has done it? He was "filled with the Spirit."

Beloved, you may say there was something extraordinary here. I know many find the most extraordinary thing here to be the pentecostal communication of tongues.

I believe the most extraordinary thing on the day of Pentecost was the outpouring of the Spirit of God, that which turned men from darkness to light, from death unto life, and from enmity to love; that turned them as it were into other men, and made the word of Peter so mighty, that three thousand fell down before the apostles, crying out, "Men and brethren, what must we do?"

Ah, little do we know what blessings there are in this communication of the Spirit in the way of sanctity. Oh, see the mighty effects in the latter part of this second chapter, the forty-sixth verse: "And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people."

My brother, may I ask you (and I ask you in tenderness), how much has your soul realized of the fulness of God? Are you saying with the Psalmist, "My soul thirst-

eth for God, the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" And with the Church, "Draw me, we will run after Thee"? Are you saying, Oh, that I had more spirituality—alas! how little advance have I made! A state of feeling and complaining like this, however, is sometimes very transient and temporary; it just lasts during the hearing of a sermon, or while talking with a friend, or while engaged in a religious exercise. Perhaps this is your case. There are such things as desires that end in nothing; there are those that "desire and have nothing;" the soul of the sluggard has that desire. If we were starving for want of bread, we must have bread; and if we were ready to die for want of water, we must have water. We would not be content with mere desires and lamentations. And I ask, and with tenderness I make the inquiry, Are you desirous to be filled with the Spirit? What is it that hinders the blessing? And I would ask, too, Are you willing to part with that evil thing? If you are not willing

to part with it, you may go on desiring to be "filled with all the fulness of God," all the days of your life, but without obtaining any supply of it; and you have no right to expect it, because God has not promised it to any but in the way of holiness.

The prayer includes in it a desire that they might have *a more clear, close, personal, and experimental knowledge of the Saviour;* of his person, work, love, grace, and sympathy; that they might know more of what God is in Him.

It also includes the desire that they might have *more spiritual life in their souls,* more light, more knowledge, more love, more submission to his will, in providence and in grace. And all this fulness of blessing received as the earnest of, and preparation for, the fulness of joy in the realms of glory.

The *importance* of this prayer may be gathered from the state of many persons in the Church of God. They have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit to see their destitution and danger; they have fled to

Christ for refuge; they have no hope but in him; their desire is not only to be in him, but also to walk with him, to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth;" yet they make but little progress in spiritual and divine things. They are safe as to their acceptance with God; for all that believe have passed from death unto life. They are building the edifice of their hope on the Rock of Ages; but they have need of further and increased communications of grace. There are heights and depths in knowledge and experience to which they have not already attained. Oh, let these seek grace, that they may be favoured to see more fully and clearly the blessedness of the union subsisting between them and their adorable Head. It may be that it is but little that they have as yet realized that Christ and his people are one; they may have as yet received but little comparatively out of the grace that is in Christ Jesus, wherewith to go forth and conquer their spiritual foes. That they have any grace, however small in degree, is an unspeakable mercy.

Though, beloved, your strength may be very small, and though you are but as the "bruised reed, and the smoking flax," yet remember for your comfort, God does not "despise the day of small things." We should be thankful for the crumbs that fall from the Master's table; but we should be prayerfully concerned to sit at the table with the "sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty." We should desire and seek after more grace, and be "pressing toward the mark for the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus"; we should be desirous of possessing such a measure of grace as may fit us for the duties and privileges of the Christian life; and as may be suitable to our experience of the ever-varying dispensations of Divine providence. We are taught to expect tribulations; but if we receive of the fulness of grace that is treasured up in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall know both how to "abound and to suffer need, to be full and to be hungry;" and in whatsoever state Providence may place us, we may

become proficients in the same heavenly science as the Apostle had learned, and with him "therewith to be content."

How much of this divine fulness do we need to *adorn the doctrine of our Saviour in all things;* lest in prosperity we should, like Jeshurun, wax fat, and abuse our mercies, or that in adversity and poverty we should be left to murmur! Oh, beloved, what grace we need to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; to maintain "a conscience void of offence, both toward God and toward man." We shall need large and constant supplies of grace, to bear patiently the afflictions and infirmities of the body, and to do cheerfully the Lord's will.

If we are filled with the fulness of God, *our resources for work and warfare will never fail us;* "for the Lord God is a sun and shield; he will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." The water that Christ gives to his people, is in them "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

We also may, from this prayer of the Apostle, *derive abundant encouragement.* The fulness from which he sought supplies of grace, in behalf of the Ephesian believers, is still the same overflowing source of blessedness as it ever was; and the promises of being supplied from it, which encouraged them, are still made to believers now. The promise belongs, not to any particular age, or favoured ones—to those who are more advanced in knowledge, holiness, faith, love, or in any, or in all, of the Christian graces. The "exceeding great and precious promises" belong as much to dwarfs as to those who are tall of stature; to the weak as well as to the strong in faith. It is God's encouragement to all his children, that he will supply all their need out of this fulness —"the riches of glory, by Christ Jesus," in whom he has treasured up all spiritual blessings for this very end.

It is also for this purpose the Holy Spirit sustains the office of Comforter, Guide, Helper, and Sanctifier; and he performs

his official engagements by leading believers through Christ up to this fulness, from whom they receive "mercy and grace to help them in every time of need."

The *mode* by which believers are led by the Holy Spirit to receive out of this fulness, is by causing them to know and feel their own emptiness and insufficiency. This lowliness of heart consists, not merely in expressing in humble phrase our "emptiness and poverty." It is one thing to make this confession, and another to feel it, and to take the lowest place before God on account of it. The process of supplying us out of this fulness, is in the hands of our Heavenly Friend. Do you, beloved, desire that you may "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"? In granting these desires of your heart, the Lord may take away some of the things with which you have been filling your cisterns.

The possession of this fulness *must be sought by earnest prayer*. It was thus

the blessing was obtained by the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Our Lord had promised to send them another Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth, by whom they should be endued with power from on high. But how were they engaged when the promise was fulfilled? They were all assembled in one place, and "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." The great Administrator of this grace having received all fulness for us, will dispense all fulness to us, and none can fill our souls with it but himself. This prayer, therefore, of the Apostle implies that we are to use every means, to be diligent in prayer in seeking it, and to leave no means untried for the attainment of this great blessing. Since all fulness is in Jesus, and all readiness is in the Father to administer all the promises given to his Church, seek to be filled in your understanding, memory, conscience, will, and affections, with "all the fulness of God."

But be assured, my brother, that before we can realize this inexhaustible fulness, sin

must be put under our feet; it must be heartily loathed and renounced. The cage of unclean birds must be cleansed from its pollution; the heart must be despoiled of its idols, before God will dwell in it. Oh, how *necessary then are the sanctifying iufluences of the Holy Spirit,* to prepare us to receive of this divine fulness. Yes, beloved, our hearts must be thoroughly humbled and contrite; the "old man" must be "crucified;" the Canaanites within must be put under tribute; there must be a denying of all "ungodliness, and worldly lusts," and the living "soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world;" or we shall never be "filled with all the fulness of God."

Forget not, my brother, the *Channel* through which this fulness can alone flow into thy soul. If we are "strengthened with all might in our inner man," it is only by being "strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus." We should, therefore, seek to possess right views of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to

realize the fulness of his merits. It is only as the Saviour rises in our esteem, as he takes his right place in our hearts and hopes, that we shall be "filled with all the fulness of God." Why is it, beloved, that we are encouraged to pray for more of the enlightening, guiding, comforting, strengthening, and sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost? Is it not that we may be advancing in holiness, and increasing in the knowledge of God? But, alas! where do we see much of this progress—this following on to know the Lord? How small the attainments, how low the aims and expectations, of too many of the professed disciples of Jesus! If we seek to ascertain why the consolations of God are thus small with us, if prayerfully and diligently we examine ourselves, shall we not find low views of Christ are at the root of it? Remember, then, that if the Holy Ghost convey the fulness of these blessings of grace nto thy soul, it is through this divinely appointed Channel. Value all means of grace,

and grieve not the Holy Spirit by neglecting them; but, oh! look for all in Christ.

Oh, how infinitely *desirable* it is that believers should be thus filled with this divine fulness. The more grace we receive from God, the more glory we shall ascribe to God. It is when we abound in the fruits of the Spirit, that our Heavenly Father is glorified. The more light in our judgments, the more love in our hearts, the more peace in our consciences, the more holiness in our lives, the more clearly will our light shine before men, and the more shall we "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

The Apostle desired the Ephesians might be thus specially favoured, as this alone would *give them the purest satisfaction and delight*, in all their circumstances of trial and persecution. Nothing tends to make us move in the way of God's commandments with so much delight, as when our hearts are thus enlarged by, and filled with, the communications of divine grace. Oh, let us not forget, my brother, that the

more we receive, the greater will be our capacity to possess this fulness. It is the strong and lively Christian that lives most on God, to God, and for God.

The best evidence we can possess of being the subjects of divine grace is, when our faith is drawing water out of "the wells of salvation." Our souls are often cast down and disquieted by reason of the weakness of our faith, and the strength of our doubts and fears; and feebleness in divine things is the consequence of neglecting to seek all needful supplies of grace from this storehouse of blessings, the "fulness of God." But when the Spirit of God brings into the soul these gracious and full communications of mercy, then how vigorous and lively are the exercises of faith and love, and hope and zeal in us; then we find that the "work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever." The more we receive of this fulness, the more are we made "meet to be partakers

of the inheritance of the saints in light." Oh, if we would live for Christ, and be strong in the Lord, rich in faith, rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, we must be day by day, and moment by moment, receiving "out of this fulness, and grace for grace."

In conclusion, I would press on you, my brother, this consideration, that while we are encouraged to ask for these great blessings, we should be thankful for what we have received. Are we, then, as thankful as we ought to be for the light we have? Are we thankful for the favours—the wisdom, the love and grace—which we have already received? The way to receive much is to be thankful for the little. Oh, let us not call that little, that required God to become incarnate, and which none but God the Spirit could ever work in our souls. Neither let us satisfy ourselves with low desires, but, "as the thirsty hart panteth after the waterbrooks," so may we be desirous of being "filled with all the fulness of God."

XVI.

The Omnipotent Helper.

"Unto him that is ABLE TO DO EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY ABOVE ALL THAT WE ASK OR THINK."
EPHES. iii. 20.

THE Apostle had just been supplicating for the brethren composing the Church at Ephesus the greatest of all spiritual blessings—that they might be "filled with all the fulness of God." He, however, knew that the very greatness of this mercy would be calculated to try their faith, and fill them with discouraging thoughts respecting themselves. The most painful exercises of mind, and the severest trials of our faith, oftentimes arise from the very largeness of the blessings promised. More frequently is

this the case with the Lord's people than they are generally aware of, or are ready to acknowledge. Many of them are saying, I do not doubt the power of God; it is rather his willingness that occasions me the greatest anxiety and fear. In so thinking, however, they are grievously mistaken; for while they have hesitating doubts of the willingness of God to help them in every time of need, they at the same time are cherishing hesitancy and doubts respecting the power of God. In such a state of mind, they can more easily believe that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, than expect ever to attain to such a height of blessedness, as to experience the full enjoyment of all the great and distinguished blessings included in this comprehensive and sublime prayer. Is it possible, they ask, that such a mean, unworthy, and sinful creature as I am, can ever be "filled with all the fulness of God"?

When we take up and read the lives of eminent saints, and admire their love, their

humility, their knowledge, their zeal, and their great usefulness, how frequently do we find this principle at work in our hearts—Is it possible that I, who am not worthy of the least of all the Lord's mercies, can ever be so filled with grace as that pious and devoted saint was?

Many things do the Lord's family see in themselves, and find in their states of mind, and in their circumstances, to discourage them. And frequently they do discourage themselves through their own want of faith in the power and grace of their heavenly Father.

Now, in this interesting statement of the all-sufficiency of God, the Apostle would take them off themselves—their temptations, their trials, their circumstances—to the Omnipotent Helper. He would not deny, or call into question, that they were to contend with great difficulties; on account of which they were in very great perplexity and distress; as well as on account of those overwhelming anxieties and fears

which arise out of low, inadequate views of the Divine character. The Apostle would therefore take them off themselves—their fears and faintings—to God Himself. He would, at least, intimate to them, that there is "nothing too hard for the Lord."

This eminent saint of God knew that right views of God lie at the foundation of all right views of religion, and are indispensable to all real, spiritual strength and comfort. Omnipotence is the peculiar attribute of God: "God has spoken once; yea, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." It is his *essentially*; he could not be God without it. To doubt this is in effect a denial of God. It is his *infinitely*; there is nothing impossible with God, nothing which he is not able to do. It is his *exclusively*. We cannot ascribe omnipotence to any one but to God; for all the power of men and of angels is but a drop of that ocean, it is but a ray of that sun; they all derive what they possess from the Fountain and Source of all being and blessed-

ness. The more, therefore, we contemplate the "exceeding greatness of his mighty power," the more we sink into utter insignificance, while at the same time we derive from these contemplations the greatest encouragement to exercise in God devout trust and confidence.

It is, therefore, a real experimental acquaintance with God's character that is the basis of all true confidence. It was such an acquaintance with this glorious attribute of Jehovah, that encouraged Abraham in that great and severe trial of his faith, who, "when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten Son: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." So when the Lord commanded him to walk before him in a perfect way, how did he comfort and encourage the Patriarch? "I am the Almighty God." In thus proclaiming himself as his Omnipotent Helper, the Lord graciously took him off himself, off his own weakness and infirmities. What but this

view of the Divine character comforted and supported Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and quenched the violence of the burning fiery furnace, which was heated seven times more than it was wont to be; they stayed themselves upon the power of God: "Our God whom we serve," said they to the imperious tyrant, "is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hands, O king." And God honoured their faith by granting them a most signal deliverance.

In this sublime Doxology, which is a fitting close to a glorious prayer, the Apostle not only places the Divine Being before the Ephesian believers, but he particularly seeks to raise their minds to a devout contemplation of the all-sufficiency of God, as an encouragement for them to seek and to expect great things from this glorious Source. And this he exhibits to them, while he calls upon them to unite with him in ascribing all blessedness to his abundant and exhaustless sufficiency, his illimitable power,

his over flowing, and everflowing fulness. In thus celebrating the all-sufficiency of God, it is as if he had said, What limit can be put to him. Look at his perfections as manifested in the great and stupendous work of *creation*. How great and illimitable the power of one that could call a world out of nothing—who with one word said, "Let there be light, and there was light." Who can set bounds to the energy of Him who brought the world into existence, and keeps and sustains that world moment by moment? For were it not for the power of the same Almighty Being in upholding and preserving them in being, as was displayed in their creation, all existences would be annihilated. If we look at the ocean in its vastness, what an exhibition is here made of the power of God. If we take a single drop of that ocean, we still see in it the exceeding greatness of his mighty power. If we, too, look at ourselves, we must exclaim with the Psalmist, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made;" and that it is "in him

we live, move, and have our being." What a view does our creation and preservation, therefore, give us of the all-sufficiency of God. For if we consider man, and God's mindfulness of him, if we examine the construction of the meanest insect, or gaze upon the sun shining in his majesty, all alike declare to us this truth, that God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

So also, if we mark His wonder-working hand in *providence*, we shall see that by slow and silent movements he is carrying out his own resolves, doing all things "after the counsels of his own will," "upholding all things by the word of his power," causing "all things to work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." So is there a still more wonderful display of his mighty power in the great work of *redemption*. Oh, glorious development of love and grace! Oh, wondrous arrangement, in which all the wants of man are met—his misery,

his wretchedness, his guilt, his sinfulness, all met by pardon, and righteousness, and sanctification, peace in God, resting in the Lord, and a hope of heaven, and all these blessings of grace—these displays of God's all-sufficiency in time, succeeded by a blessed and glorious immortality! Oh, wondrous scheme, in which all the malice and machinations of Satan are foiled, and all the perfections of God are glorified! Herein "is love," and herein is the "wisdom of God," and the "power of God," most gloriously developed.

If, therefore, we look at his being, he is the Almighty God; if we contemplate his perfections, they are infinite; if we consider his work in creation, providence, and grace, all these separately and conjointly confirm the declaration of the Apostle—He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

The Apostle thus not only placed before the Ephesians the all-sufficiency of Jehovah, for the purpose of encouraging

them to direct their thoughts in all times of danger or difficulty to his illimitable power, but also pressed upon them attention to, and awakened in them recollections of, his ceaseless communications. In the writings of this Apostle, and other of the sacred penmen, the Divine Being is represented as the God and Father of his people—the "Father of mercies," and the "God of all grace"—and as having treasured up grace in Christ to help us in all times of our need; yea, that he hath "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

The *expression* the Apostle here employs to set forth this aspect of the Divine all-sufficiency in supplying the necessities of the saints is very striking and remarkable. At the same time, nothing could have been more in harmony with the preceding requests which he had presented to God for this people. He had poured out his full soul in large and comprehensive petitions for blessings of incalculable and infi-

nite worth, and evinced the strength and firmness of his trust and confidence in God in these fervent supplications.

The principal *object* the Apostle had in view in thus leading the minds of the Lord's people to fix their faith in the power of God, was to encourage them to make known unto God their requests under their ordinary trials, and their still more pressing and urgent emergencies. The all-sufficiency of God we are here assured can, and does, far exceed all we can ask or think in all our approaches to the throne of grace.

Many are the encouragements and exhortations given to us in the word of God, on the subject of prayer. We have not only the example of the Apostle in these supplications for the saints at Ephesus, but we have his express and solemn injunction to "pray without ceasing;" and in "every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to let our requests be made known unto God."

And we have a still higher example of

frequent and fervent prayer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We find him perpetually going away into a place apart to pray; and the garden, and the retired mountain, were sought by him to pour forth his supplications, in strong cryings, and tears, unto his divine Father; and he was heard, in that he feared. By parable and precept—the parable illustrating the precept—our Lord has given us, in the case of the importunate widow, a forcible illustration of the obligations, nature, and advantages of importunate prayer. The Lord himself thus commanded and encouraged his disciples to pray—"Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened." Yea, he says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." "And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will do it." "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

In this wonderful expression we notice that God's *power to bestow upon us all needed blessings, exceeds our ability to sup-*

plicate them. How much, my brother, have we to ask for; for ourselves as individuals, for our families, and collectively for the Church of God and for all men! The longer we live, the more do we find our foes and fears multiply; and the necessities of the Lord's people, instead of diminishing as they advance heavenward, are ever on the increase.

Oh, what a great and inestimable privilege is prayer! it seems to confer a distinguished and peculiar dignity upon fallen man, to be invited to approach to God himself. To pour out of the abundance of the heart all our confessions and all our desires into the ears of a merciful Creator, is a blessing which we can never sufficiently value, or too frequently avail ourselves of. It is, however, only when the Spirit of God helpeth our infirmities, that our souls are drawn out in prayer, and in dependence on God. It is then we get those wants of ours supplied, which all the holy angels cannot satisfy, and obtain the victory over all our enemies.

It is, beloved, no little proof of your adoption into the Lord's family, if you are conscious that you have many desires, many spiritual thirstings, that nothing can satisfy but God himself. Let us gratefully and in faith take encouragement from the truth here stated—that God is able to fulfil our most enlarged desires; and beyond this, that God's grace in giving exceeds our faith in asking; so that when we ask for the largest share of his gifts and grace, however comprehensive our requests, however great the blessings we seek—even though they have respect to our being "strengthened with all might by the Spirit in our inner man"—to be able to "comprehend with all saints, what is the height, and depth, and and length, and breadth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge;" yea, even though we pray, to be "filled with the fulness of God,"—when we have in these petitions stretched our desires to the utmost limits, yet our God can do for us "exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think."

Like the horseleech, which is represented as evermore crying, "Give, give!" so more and more, more and more, do the saints desire of the spiritual blessings which are treasured up in the Lord Jesus Christ. And when our desires ascend for more knowledge, more love, more spirituality, more of the spirit of adoption, more singleness of eye, more simplicity of aim, more weanedness from the world, more care for others, and less concern for our own comfort—when we are disposed to deny ourselves for others—when we feel somewhat of what the Saviour felt when he shed tears over Jerusalem—when we mourr over the division of God's saints—when we long and pray for the prospect to be realized when they shall all be seen to be one, and when we strive to be one, and long for it and pray for it—and when we think of the heathen world, and care for its darkness and wretchedness, all these desires come from God, and they are pleasing to God; they go up perfumed with the sweet incense of the Saviour's intercession; they are the fruit of

his own blessed Spirit; they honour and glorify God. When we urge requests like these, we may confidently expect that he will grant us all we then ask. "Never," saith Rutherford, "is he better pleased than when we take our emptiness, our poverty and weakness, our sicknesses to him. Never have we a more cordial welcome, a more abundant blessing, than when in the deep feeling of our poverty we go and cast our weakness upon his strength." Oh, that in the simplicity of a child,—oh, that in the power of the Holy Ghost, we might so be led to act with God, and to say, "Lord, I reason not, thou hast said it; I believe it!"

God not only gives in answer to prayer, but gives *more* than his people ask. Thus it was with Jacob, he prayed, and God not only granted him what he asked, but far exceeded all his desires. He prayed that he might have bread to eat, and raiment to wear, and safe guidance; and, lo, he who with his simple staff had passed solitarily

along in his wearying journey, now passeth with his flocks and herds in two bands. Thus did Jehovah exceed in giving what the patriarch had sought in praying. So it was with Solomon; he prayed not for riches, nor for honour, nor yet for long life, but for "a wise and understanding heart." And over and above the blessing sought were these distinguished favours added unto him.

So it was with David—his father before him; he said, "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" No it is not the manner of man to give more than is asked, or more than is promised, or expected; but it is the manner of God.

So, also, is this exemplified in the experience of the Church, as it is stated in the fifth chapter of the Canticles, and the first verse. In the former chapter the Church

had been asking her Beloved to come "into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." But now she realizes more than she had asked for; he not only came and partook of this delightful repast himself, but he invited his beloved to participate with him in these blissful and hallowed enjoyments; he says, "Eat, O friends, and drink abundantly, O beloved."

Not only is God able to give us what we ask, but *all* that we ask, and *above* all we ask; not only above all that we ask, but *abundantly* above all we ask; and not only abundantly, but *exceedingly* abundantly above all that we ask; and not only above all that we ask, but all that we *think*.

Let, this consideration, my brother, have the widest possible range in thy thoughts, that God can exceed, in giving blessings to his people, the very highest desires, and loftiest conceptions, of their minds. Our very best desires are faint and few; yet our thoughts and wishes may often very far exceed in fulness and strength our powers of expres-

sion; but though we may give the fullest scope to our imagination, enlarge our desires, and multiply our wishes to the greatest possible extent, we never can comprehend the greatness and the glory of the blessings which God is able to bestow upon his believing people. Do not we find, beloved, when we are musing on the love that "passeth knowledge"—

> "Imagination's utmost stretch
> In wonder dies away."

So that the prayers of God's saints, whether "uttered or unexpressed," are not only answered, but far, yea abundantly, exceeded. He not only grants what blessings we feel to be necessary, but gives us more than we ask, and even more than we really think we need.

Oh, how poor, at the best, are our conceptions of the fulness of God's grace in providing, and in bestowing, all suitable and needed blessings upon his people! Indeed, there is in all that God is, and in all that he does, a fulness and sufficiency that far

exceeds our most enlarged desires and powers of contemplation.

The abundant pardoning love of God, as displayed *in forgiving sins*, is far beyond the hopes of the most humble penitent that ever smote upon his breast, while, with the publican, he cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This is one of the greatest encouragements for a sinner to hope in God's mercy. Oh, beloved, thou mayest be one of the greatest sinners that ever lived upon the earth; there may be such a crimson in thy sins, such a deep scarlet in thy transgressions, that if thy next neighbour were to know what thou art, if he were a strict Pharisee, he would wish to withdraw from thee, and he might justly do so. Speaking of sin as man speaks of it, there may be such enormity in thy sin, that no language can describe; yet, be not discouraged in seeking, "for," saith the Lord, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." While the pardon of the least sin is above the power of the

highest angel, the power and grace of God in forgiving thy greatest and most aggravated offences far exceed your most fervent desires, and earnest supplications. Oh, who can conceive of the fulness and the freeness of that forgiveness, which extends to the uttermost of human guilt, and exceeds the uttermost of human desire!

To the Lord our God belongs the exclusive prerogative to forgive sins; and he forgives like a God. We, my brother, forgive as men; but His forgiveness hath in it all the magnificence of his own grace and goodness. He forgiveth not by halves, not grudgingly, not coldly, not with secret misgivings; he forgiveth freely, absolutely, and gloriously, because he is God.

"Is anything too hard for me?" saith the Lord. This is as if God had said, "Have I not pardoned thousands and tens of thousands as vile as thou art? Have they not been brought to welcome the Saviour? Have they not acknowledged my omnipotent grace, and been encouraged to

rely upon and accept my gracious invitation and promise—'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon?' 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' As if the Lord had said, "There is, O sinner, a depth in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness which your sins can never fathom; there is a fulness in my mercy which your guilt can never exhaust." Unto you, O broken-hearted and sin-distressed soul, "is the word of this salvation sent." However great your sins may be, His love and grace in forgiving is "exceeding abundantly above all you ask or think."

There is nothing that more discourages a child of God, than the subject of *deep sanctification.* All the Lord's people earnestly desire, and long for, and pray to realize

more of the power of grace in their souls, subduing the sins and corruptions of their nature within them, and strengthening them in all their weakness and feebleness; so that while "they may feel themselves," as Rutherford says, to be "sinking into the depths of their own vileness, they shall be rising up into all the loveliness of Christ."

In answering the prayers of his people for an increase in spirituality and of holiness of heart and life, the Lord does it in a way often very distressing to their feelings, as well as trying to their faith. Few of God's saints who are thus seeking after more holiness have faith enough to believe that the very circumstances by which they are most severely tried, may be the very means by which their sanctification is being promoted. And yet, beloved, whatever drives thee to Christ, whatever makes Christ precious to thee, whatever endears his name to thee, whatever brings thee to the end of self, whatever makes his

righteousness glorious in thy estimation, whatever makes thee dependent only on his arm, whatever strips thee of self-dependence and self-wisdom, is the very thing by which thy soul is most sanctified.

That God is able to do more in effecting the sanctification of his people than they either "ask or think," may be proved by the actual promise which is given us in the fifth chapter of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And then the Apostle adds, "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." He has engaged his word that he will accomplish it. Oh, happy they then, whoso enter into the truth of the Apostle's word, that while they may say, Though I have all this inward warfare, and these fightings without, though these outward circumstances seem to say to me, nay; yet Lord I come to thee, believing in thy

promise, waiting upon thee in the means which thou hast appointed, and believing that there is an all-sufficiency, as well as a willingness on thy part to "do exceeding abundantly above all I ask or think;" to work in me this deep sanctification.

Yes, beloved, thy God, when thou prayest to be kept, will not only preserve thee from the wiles and devices of the Devil, his power and policy, but will "shortly bruise Satan under thy feet;" and "when the enemy cometh in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." When, my brother, thou art praying for the removal of some trial, some thorn in the flesh, thou shalt hear thy Saviour say, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength shall be made perfect in thy weakness." So that thou shalt not only be enabled to bear patiently thy trials and afflictions, but to rejoice in tribulations also; and when thou art saying, in reference to thy duties and difficulties, "Who is sufficient for these things?" thou shalt find the all-

sufficiency of God, in granting unto thee more grace to help, "exceeding abundantly above all" thou art able to "ask or think;" so that thou shalt be able to say with the Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Ask, then, beloved, great things of God, expect great things from God; thou canst not exhaust his resources, nor weary his patience. There is not a difficulty thou hast, but God can bring thee through it; there is not a single hindrance but he can make thee an overcomer by it. These very difficulties are the field in which Jehovah displays his great glory; thy poor feeble body, thy nervousness of spirit, thy domestic circumstances, shall prove the very means whereby thou art to learn out the glory of God's power and grace, and the fulness there is in Christ to meet thine every necessity.

What sweet encouragement there is in this subject for feeble saints; those who are weak in grace, who, instead of adding to their faith, are always doubting and fearing; they

think themselves so weak and so feeble, and such poor, unworthy creatures; and in their unbelief are casting from them the "exceeding great and precious promises;" they are oftentimes saying, Is mine the "faith of God's elect?" have I any faith at all? any repentance, any grief, any devotedness, any fruitfulness? And thus they go on discouraging themselves. This, beloved, is not according to God's word; we are exhorted to "add to our faith," to be thankful for the least faith, to adore the Lord for the distinguishing grace which gave us any faith at all, and to seek by all means in our power to increase it; at the same time we should be gratefully acknowledging its divine Author and Giver. Oh, beloved, it is thy mercy to be thus assured that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all thou hast asked, or can ask, or even think.

The Lord giveth unto his believing people more grace, and, "to them that have no might he increaseth strength;" and "they that wait upon the Lord shall

renew their strength." Has not God already done for thee more than *can* be done for thee? My dear brother, thou mayest think this statement to be not quite correct, for so bent art thou upon the increase of thy faith (and well mayest thou be thus earnest after this great blessing), that thou art forgetting the greatest spiritual blessing which thou hast already received —the first gift of faith. It was a greater putting forth of Divine power in raising Lazarus from the dead, than to "loose him, and let him go." And oh! what wonders of grace there were associated with the first quickening power of the Spirit of God, in bringing thee from "death unto life," from "darkness into God's marvellous light!" Oh, be thankful for the grace already imparted, and pray for its increase; but never forget that God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all you ask or think."

This subject also affords encouragement *to all who are engaged in the work of the Lord.* The Lord can carry on his cause

in the midst of all the hindrances by which we are surrounded in these days; he can make his people holy, prosperous, devoted, and happy.

May we, therefore, be much more earnest in seeking the blessing of God upon his Church everywhere, that he would "bless the provisions of his house, and fill his poor with bread;" and that he would clothe "his ministers with salvation, and make all his saints rejoice in goodness." Oh, let us not be discouraged at the present aspect of the Church, "For all these things, saith the Lord, will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." For we may be fully assured that however sincere and fervent their desires, however laborious, zealous, and prayerful in effort, the Lord's servants may be; He whom they serve, and to whom they look for success, is able to do by them and for them, "exceeding abundantly above all they ask or think."

And what great and suitable encouragement does this assurance also give to *praying*

parents! Oh, with what earnest supplications have they gone to the throne of grace in behalf of those near and dear to them! They have prayed and prayed until they have almost ceased to hope that their requests will be heard, and have almost begun to think all their prayers to be ineffectual; they have, alas! been weary in praying. Oh, let all such think upon these encouraging words. It may be, beloved, the blessing thou seekest is still delayed, and still thou dost pour out thy prayer, "O that Ishmael might live before thee." Although thou art ready to say, "The Lord hath forgotten to be gracious, and "he hath shut out my prayer," yet say not, think not, thy prayer is ineffectual; the answer may come when the clods of the valley have covered thee; it may come with much power of the Holy Ghost, and thou shalt have cause to adore a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God through all eternity; for he "is able to do exceeding abundantly" for thee and thine "above all thou canst ask or think."

Let us remember that the Lord is not only able to grant us much more than we ask, but that he is more willing to bestow the blessings of his grace than we are disposed to supplicate them; for He hath not said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. If we open the word of God, we can scarcely look anywhere but we find encouragements to prayer, both on our own account, as well as on account of others. Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and the Ethiopians fled before him (2 Chron. xiv. 12). Jehoshaphat prayed, and the Lord "smote all his enemies upon the cheekbone." Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed, and the Lord said, "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears, behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years." The Apostle James saith, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man of like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months; and he prayed

again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." The poor woman of Canaan prayed, and the Lord gave her the blessing she desired. The apostles prayed that they might preach the word with all boldness and success; and they went forth everywhere, and the hand of the Lord was with them, enabling them so to speak, as that multitudes believed. We are not, therefore, straitened in Him, but we are straitened in our own bowels. Remember, my brother, who it is that pleadeth for us before the throne; and there is not only an Intercessor *for* the saints, but an Intercessor *in* the saints, who is pleading for them with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Happy souls, happy ye among the sons of men, who are earnest wrestlers with God at the throne of grace! Talk not, O worldling, about your outward prosperity, your domestic comforts; boast not of the health and comeliness of your body, of the depth and brilliancy of your intellect; that man and that woman, whoever or whatever

they may be, young or old, rich or poor, they who really know most of these inward intercessions of the Holy Ghost, are far happier than those who, destitute of this Spirit of prayer, possess all the world calls good or great.

My brethren, when I think of these things, it seems as if our choicest earthly comforts were as nothing in comparison to the having God for our Friend, Jesus for our Intercessor and Advocate, the Holy Ghost for our Helper, Comforter, and Guide, and all the promises of Jehovah for our inalienable portion. And how encouraging, too, the assurance, of our being "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." How great and glorious the privilege! for this is to be put in possession of all that is worthy the name of happiness. "Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

XVII.

The Operations of Grace.

"According to the power which worketh in us."
EPHES. iii. 20.

IN order to establish believers in the grand and glorious truth which the Apostle, in the former part of the verse, had stated concerning the all-sufficiency of God, and to encourage them to pray for, and expect larger communications of grace, he reminds them of the power that was then working in their hearts.

In nothing is the weakness of faith more displayed than in reference to answers to prayer. How frequently do unbelieving doubts and fears arise in the minds of the Lord's people, especially when they are exhorted to cast all their care upon

God, and to pour out their souls before Him in earnest supplication; and when urged to these exercises, on the ground that He will supply all their need, and will not only grant unto them what they ask, but do for them "exceeding abundantly above all they ask or think"—how often are they saying, How can these things be?

To meet this state of mind, and to induce, as I have said, a wrestling spirit in prayer for the blessings of grace and providence, the Apostle here places before them an additional ground of hope —an encouragement to pray for more grace, founded on their experience of the operations of the Divine power, as had already been, and which was at that very time actually working within them.

Men may be convinced of the wickedness of some of their sinful habits, and be reformed in their outward conduct; many there are who find out the evil of sin by the bitterness of its fruits even in this world, yet they are as spiritually ignorant

of its real nature as a corpse, or as the rock on which they may be standing. It is the work of the Holy Ghost alone to make a man sensible of his need of pardon; it seems but trifling with the sinner to say, "Why do you not believe in Christ?" Why, the reason is, because he believes in himself.

The first concern of God's servants is to clear the ground of whatever may obstruct the growth of the tender blade, or the safety of the building. Hence we are enjoined not to sow amongst thorns, nor to build among rubbish. And in beginning the work of grace in the soul, the Holy Ghost taketh down before He buildeth up; he layeth a man's hopes in the dust preparatory to his unfolding to him the true ground of hope, which is in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, the Spirit's great work—his own work, a work requiring omnipotence to achieve it—to bring the sinner to a knowledge of his exceeding sinfulness; so that he cometh to the throne of grace laden with the burden of his iniquity, and stand-

eth just where the publican stood, and with his very prayer—"God be merciful to me a sinner." When the sinner is thus convinced of his inward plague, who can bring in a ray of hope to that poor convinced soul? We can talk of the promises, our tongues can run over the sweet and gracious encouragements contained therein, but who is it that brings home a promise to the heart? Who is it that makes it as sweet music to the sinner's soul? Who is it that causes the promise to distil as the dew upon the new mown grass? God asserts it as his own prerogative when He says, "I create, peace—peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near."

In writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle speaks of the conversion of a sinner from the error of his way as a work of *creation;* as great a work as that when he said, "Let there be light, and there was light." And so it is; and our own observations supply us with abundant illustrations of this truth. The royal Psalmist,

in the fifty-first Psalm, speaks also of the work of sanctification under the idea of a new creation in that prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me!" thereby intimating that in all the subsequent operations of grace, it is absolutely necessary that the power of God should be continually exerted.

We reason with individuals burdened with a sense of guilt—we endeavour to apply the balm of Gilead to their troubled consciences—but, alas! how much legality, how much self-righteousness and unbelief, how much depth of despair, there is to be found in their souls! We place before them the various grounds of encouragement with which the Scriptures of truth abound; we are convinced they are suitable, yea incontrovertible, yet they pass over their minds just as the feeble breath over the polished mirror. But when the Spirit of God brings home the word with power to the heart, how sweet and blessed are the results. Then it is that the free-

ness and the fulness of the grace of Christ are unfolded to the sinner, and he is enabled to rise up out of his region of misgivings, doubts, and uncertainties, to the enjoyment of a free, a full, and finished salvation in the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

O beloved! there is in the Gospel a free welcome to all comers; there is in it that which reaches the poorest, the meanest, and the vilest that come; a table spread with the richest and the most abundant provisions. And for whom? For paupers, for those who have nothing; not merely for those who *bring* nothing, who *offer* nothing, but for those who *have* nothing, and they *know* they have nothing; and when this power worketh in them, they come and take what the Lord thus freely gives. It is, therefore, my brother, as great a work to bring home peace to thy conscience, to allay the conflicting and distressing emotions of thy soul, and to quiet it under heavy affliction, and painful providential dispensations, as was thy conversion to God at the first.

It is this continual supply of the eternal Spirit by which we are strengthened day by day, and which is especially put forth in seasons of peculiar trial. Ordinary supplies will not suffice for extraordinary cases. Hence we obtain grace to help us in every time of need. More grace is promised to us, and is prepared for us. If, therefore, we would realize these gracious communications, we must be fervent in our supplications at the throne of grace. But in what school, and under what teacher are we taught thus to pray? Oh, beloved! we are brought into circumstances of actual need; the school of affliction it is in which the Holy Spirit brings us to seek grace, that we may be "strengthened with all might," and "filled with all the fulness of God." Thus he disposes our hearts, having disposed his own ear to hear; he makes us cry, he fills us; we ask him for more, he giveth us more. "He giveth grace to the humble;" he makes us humble that we may receive the grace he imparts. The great end and object of all His dealings with

his people is to strengthen the weak, to bring them to rest upon Christ, to live on Christ, and to live for Christ; to conquer the world, to tread it under our feet, to deny self, and to make us strong to overcome all our corruptions. And it is by the same gracious dealings we are brought to mourn for secret sins, and made active and diligent in the service of the Lord. The work of grace in conversion and in sanctification is thus clearly manifested to be the work of God.

This encouragement is equally suitable, and as necessary, to induce believers in the present day prayerfully to seek for further manifestations of the Saviour's love and grace, seeing that, from the first to the last, the work of grace in them is carried on in the very teeth of Satan, and in direct opposition to the flesh; it runs against wind and tide. There is not a principle of our nature but what is against that which is spiritual; so that to keep the soul of the believer alive amidst disease and death, to make it vigorous and active in the

exercises of love, humility, and all the Christian graces, amidst the deadening influences of carnality and worldliness; and moment by moment to keep us from falling a prey to the ensnaring and beguiling influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil, as well as to restore the backslider in heart and in conduct, to penitence and hope, requires the putting forth of no less a power than that by which our Lord was raised from the dead.

It is, therefore, to the "power which worketh in us," we are to ascribe our standing and preservation in the Divine life. And only as we are thus upheld in our goings is it that our footsteps slip not, for if we look back only but for one day, we shall see that nothing but the power of God could have kept us from making "shipwreck of faith, and of a good conscience."

Men may talk of the glories of creation; but these come infinitely short of the glory of God's work in the new creation. That glorious work, that wondrous dis-

play of Jehovah's power, by which the lineaments of God's image are reproduced and restored in the souls of fallen men.

The certainty of this work of grace in the soul being fully performed and perfected was a matter of holy confidence both to the Apostle Paul and to the man after God's own heart. In writing to the Philippians, the former said, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ;" and the latter said, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me; forsake not the work of thine own hands." These holy men rejoiced in a full and firm conviction of mind, that the Lord would maintain, deepen, and finish his own work in the hearts of his people.

The Saviour will give to the weakest and feeblest lamb in his flock eternal life; and the work begun in regeneration shall issue in eternal glory. Oh, is it not, my brother,

blessed to know, that he will give to all his saints, the entire, the full, complete, and everlasting possession and enjoyment of himself in heaven; that soon their faith shall be lost in sight, their hope be swallowed up in possession; that their prayers shall give place to praise; their conflicts, their fight of faith, and their inward struggles with Satan, shall be crowned with complete success; and all as the result of the "power which worketh in us?"

The great truth, however, which is set forth by the Apostle in these words, is that all the blessings that believers shall be favoured to realize, until the good work of grace begun in them is performed in the day of Jesus Christ, *will be communicated according to the operations of the "power which worketh in us."* The power which now worketh in the saints is an earnest, and pledge of what God will yet do for them. Oh, my brother, hast thou, by the power of the Spirit working in thee, been brought to the throne of grace, heavy laden with a sense of guilt, grieving

and mourning under thy ponderous burden? Art thou coming to him for pardon and rest? Remember for thy encouragement, that he who has taught thee to feel thy need of mercy and grace, is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think;" and he will grant unto thee the blessings thou art seeking, according to the exigencies of thy case, and the hopes he has inspired within thee—yea, and infinitely beyond all thou canst desire and hope for. Take, for instance, his grace in answering thy fervent supplications to realize thine acceptance with God through Christ, and for conformity to him in all things. Oh, wilt not thou, in thinking and realizing, that God is at peace with thee; that he has graciously pardoned thee through the redemption that is in Christ, be walking circumspectly, and "pass the time of thy sojourning here in fear"? Will not the application of the atoning blood, and the grace of the Spirit displayed in his sprinkling that blood upon thy conscience, produce in thee that

meekness and gentleness, that tenderness and lowliness, that holiness and peace, that deep sanctification which thou hast been so earnestly seeking at the throne of grace?

It was thus the Apostle encouraged the believers to whom he wrote, to continue instant and earnest in *prayer for the enjoyment of forgiving love, and sanctifying grace.* Do you ask me how the application is made? By the "power which worketh in us," thou hast been brought to seek him whom thou hast offended, in brokenness and contrition of spirit; thou dost pour out thine heart before him; thou confessest thy sins; thou tellest him that thou hast sinned against him in thought, in word, and in deed; and the Lord answers thee according to the power of his own grace which is now working in thy heart. He graciously assures thee that thy sins are forgiven and entirely put away, as though they had never been committed. He gives thee the strongest possible assurance that the sins thou hast thus confessed and mourned over, and sought forgiveness for,

he never will remember against thee any more. These promises thou art enabled to believe; the forgiving word is applied to thy soul. The grace of the Gospel is heard; the Spirit of God worketh in thee faith to receive it. Thine understanding is enlightened to see its real and blessed import; and by the same power thine affections are now moved through thy understanding, and thou art brought to the enjoyment of the assurance that God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all thou dost ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."

And so, also, as we have already hinted, with regard to the all-sufficiency of God, in the great work of sanctification. The desire for holiness of heart and life is entirely owing to "the power which worketh in us." It is this putting forth of God's power that creates in us clean hearts, and renews within us right spirits; that strengthens and carries on the work of faith in our souls, and by this power our sins are slain, and we become crucified to the world.

It is thus we are led to act from high and holy principles. This is the mighty lever which gives to us spirituality of mind, deadness to self and sin and that quickens our souls when they are cleaving to the dust.

Oh, it is not, beloved, the study of the precepts at the foot of Sinai that produces this internal holiness; it is the "power which worketh in us" that brings the soul into communion with God. "One real going forth of the soul in communion with God," saith that good and holy man of God, Dr. Owen, "through a view of the atoning blood, will more crucify a man to sin than all the power of self-resolution for a thousand years."

What an encouragement is this to *prayer!* Does the Holy Ghost put forth his power in thus working in our hearts? Remember, my brother, that it is our exalted privilege to be always waiting upon him. If it require omnipotence to carry on the work of grace in us; if nothing but the energy of the eternal Spirit is able to

bring home Divine truth with power to our hearts and consciences, how it admonishes us to be much in prayer, to be turning over the pages of Scripture and conscience, so that we may see the all-sufficiency of God manifested after the counsel of his own will, and the administration of that power put forth in the way his wisdom and goodness hath appointed! God hath already done a mighty work in us; and our past experience is an encouragement to pray for supplies of grace as our circumstances may require. If so much power hath been put forth in us, all other operations of grace needed and promised shall follow. Our progress heavenward, our advance in holiness, our deliverance from all evil, our final safety and admission into everlasting glory, being the assured and certain results of the "power which worketh in us."

Oh, beloved! how unspeakably great and blessed is the privilege to be thus lifted up above ourselves, above our circumstances; for if the Lord hath placed us in circum-

stances that we think unpropitious and injurious, yet if *he* has placed us in them, it is a libel against God, and an impeachment of his divine perfections to indulge in murmurs and complaints. Is he not our Father—our covenant Father, too? Alas! how often are the Lord's people throwing the blame upon circumstances, and desiring a deliverance from the pressure of occupation, or a change of situation where as, they think, they can more calmly and quietly live, and enjoy more frequent and uninterrupted communion with God. All this, beloved, comes from Satan; for when God places us in any situation, there is grace enough assured to us for that situation; and there is enough power and grace in the eternal Spirit to make a man a gainer by his losses, and stronger in his weakness. So that there is in us as much rebellion as folly when we say, Oh, that I were removed from that occupation, or delivered from the pressure of that every-day curse!

If, my brother, God doth not see fit to take

thee out of thy present circumstances, he is able to make these very circumstances which seem to thee to be so undesirable and burdensome, the very means of working out thy real good, and spiritual welfare. He is the all-sufficient God. Did he not say to Abraham, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect"? So doth he, my brother, say to thee. Walk, then, before him; walk as being under his eye; walk as being near to his heart. Oh, forget not his name. God all-sufficient, "who is able to do" for thee "exceeding abundantly above all you ask or think, according to the power which worketh in us." In this assurance there is enough for all things terrestial, enough for all things bodily, enough for all things spiritual, enough for life, enough for death, enough for evermore.

But there is in the subject, in its application to ourselves, that which is *deeply abasing*. How great and glorious are our privileges, how exceeding great and precious the promises which are given to us, how ab-

solutely certain is it that they shall all be fulfilled in the experience of all the saints; for not only is God, who hath promised unto us a supply of all needed good and help, able to do all he hath said, and to exceed all our most enlarged wishes and desires, but "he is faithful that promised, who also will do it." And yet how weak in faith, how full of unbelieving doubts and fears are we, how low our aims, how feeble our desires, how cold and formal our prayers, how limited our expectations! Alas! instead of mounting up as on the wings of eagles, of running without weariness, and of walking without fainting, how have we, if we may say so, been drudging on.

This declaration of the Apostle is also deeply *practical and suggestive;* it exhorts us to pray constantly, fervently, and believingly; and to enlarge the boundary of our desires and expectations. The basis of all true prayer is the promise, and the basis of the promise is the power and faithfulness of the God who hath promised, and the

manner of his fulfilling the promise is "according to the power that worketh in us."

In conclusion, how encouraging, how abundantly encouraging is this great and glorious assurance to awakened sinners, all in whom this power has begun to work, who, convinced of their sinful state and condition before God, and who, struggling with the sinful propensities and powerful corruptions of their hearts, are crying to God to be delivered from the guilt and power of sin. Though thou dost feel thyself, poor sinner, to be destitute of all goodness, and art full of distressing fears, lest thy vileness and unworthiness have rendered thy salvation well nigh hopeless, if not altogether impossible: yet be assured that it is thy mercy to know that God not only can save unto the uttermost all that come unto him seeking mercy and grace in the name, and pleading the merits and mediation of his beloved Son, but that however guilty and depraved thou dost feel thyself to be, he will save; for our God not only

does not, but cannot turn away his face from those who seek him. He who hears the prayer of the destitute will listen to thy feeblest cry, and will not despise thy prayer. With the Lord there is forgiveness, that he may be feared, and with him there is plenteous redemption, that he may be sought unto. However weak and helpless thou dost feel thyself to be, he can strengthen thee with all might by his Spirit. Yea, he is able to do for thee—in forgiving and subduing thy sins, in freeing thee from guilt and condemnation, in sanctifying all the powers of thy soul, and in upholding thee in the way of righteousness—to an extent exceeding abundantly above all thou canst ask or think, "according to the power which worketh in us."

XVIII.

The Doxology.

"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."
EPHES. iii. 21.

THIS is a most fitting anthem with which the Apostle concludes the sublime and fervent supplications, presented to God by him; for as he had in these expressed a deep and prayerful solicitude for the welfare of this Church, so here he expresses his earnest and devout concern for the Divine glory.

The Apostle would have the Church in all ages to join in a similar song of praise and thanksgiving as that which was sung by the seraphim host, "Glory to God in the highest" was the song of the angelic

choir when they came down to witness to the incarnation of the Son of God. It was the first note of the anthem when they announced a Child born, and a Son given. The proclamation extended to heaven while it spread over the earth, teaching us what is God's great and principal design in the salvation of men.

There is nothing which can effect the essential glory of God—it is derivable alone from himself; the sins of the whole world cannot diminish it, nor can the cross of Christ add to it, for it is infinite. Yet if there be one point above others upon which God is jealous, it is his glory. This is verified in the history of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. x. 1, 2, 3): "Before all the people I will be glorified." To the same principle the death of Herod is ascribed (Acts xii. 23): "He was eaten of worms because he gave not God the glory." And in the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, the twenty-third verse, we read, "The Lord hath redeemed Jacob and glorified himself in Israel." Where we learn

that it was not a mere act of mercy that blotted out transgression, but that God might be glorified in it. And in the sixtieth chapter, the twenty-first verse: "Thy people shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified." And in the sixty-first chapter, the third verse, the Lord's people are said to be "The trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that he might be glorified." And in the first chapter of this Epistle, the Apostle declares, that if we are "accepted in the Beloved, it is for the glory of his grace." If we "obtain an inheritance in Christ, it is that we may be to the praise of his glory." If sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, it is also "unto praise of his glory" (Ephes. i. 14).

Indeed this great truth runs through the whole of the Sacred Scriptures, that God is glorified in every part of our salvation. He says in the forty-second chapter of Isaiah, the eighth verse, "My glory will

I not give unto another." God has given his earth to the children of men; he causeth his sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and unjust; he hath given all things to his people (1 Cor. iii. 22), and more than this, he hath given them his Son—the best and the greatest of all gifts; he has given them his Spirit also, but he has never given them his glory, though he has created them expressly for it.

I am far from thinking that when the axe is laid at the root of self at our first conversion to God, that the work is done for ever. There are many seasons in the life of a Christian when he needs the crucifixion of self. Self denies the authority of God; self denies God in his faithfulness, in his unchangeableness, in his love. Though such is the malignant and palpable character of this sin, yet every system of religion but that of the Bible overlooks this principle. We find this to be the fact whether we speak to the Jew or the Socinian, to the careless sinner or the

high professor. If we turn to Rev. xviii. 7, we shall see who it is that glorifies herself, and the bitter consequences of so doing. And this is the character of all false religions; folly has taken self, and put it on the throne of God.

In the Gospel-scheme of salvation, the glory of God *is provided for,* and only here; it is the end of all the Divine purposes; and is secured by the cross of Christ. "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake." Not only does the Sun of righteousness shine, but it shines through a more glorious medium, and our eyes are opened to behold it. Then, also, in the sceptre of Christ we see God reinstated in his throne. In the instance of the Publican, we see God taking possession of the soul—not the possession which a parent has of a child, but that which a sovereign has of a subject. The Publican stands self-abased before God, and submits to his authority. The purpose of Immanuel, in the exercise of his sovereignty,

is to reinstate Jehovah in the souls of his people. We see, not only a glorious display of the Divine perfections in the scheme of salvation, but we behold in its development those perfections completely harmonized. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." And the grand design and result of all is, "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, and goodwill toward men."

The Apostle having made known his wants and requests unto God for his beloved Ephesians in these remarkable petitions, closes with this sublime Doxology. Oh, what materials had these saints for praising and glorifying God. The Apostle herein would have them unite with all the Lord's family, in every age, circumstance, and place, to render thanks to God for the numerous and unspeakable benefits which they had received.

This duty of ascribing glory and praise to God, *has been urged upon the Church in all ages.* In the hundredth and forty-ninth

Psalm, the fifth and sixth verses, believers are exhorted to "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises to him with the timbrel and harp." Then he gives as the reason: "For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation." And then, as if carried beyond the precincts of time, he addresses the saints in glory, calling upon them to be joyful—"Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds." "Praise is comely for the upright;" and "whoso offereth praise, glorifieth God;" and never is the soul more under the influence of the Spirit of grace, than when under the influence of the spirit of praise.

Glorying in the Lord is not only commanded, but is due to him; *all temporal blessings* are alone from him, and for these we are under special obligations

to praise him. Our being we derive from him, and our well-being is to be ascribed alone to his manifold and abundant goodness; for "in him we live, and move, and have our being." All the springs of earthly happiness are in him, and are to be gratefully received and acknowledged by us.

He is the Fountain of *all spiritual blessings*. It is to these the Apostle refers in the first chapter of this Epistle, the third verse, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." This devout and grateful song includes not some, but all gifts, all grace, all glory. All these abundant mercies are from him; and, therefore, all glory belongs to him, and can belong to none else but him.

Oh, what thankfulness and praise is due to God *for his great salvation*—a salvation as free as it is full; for what a glorious all-comprehending gift was Christ to his people! It is no small mercy, be-

loved, to reflect on what we are before God, that we are not only out of hell, but we are standing on praying ground, with such a God, and have a throne of grace to go to; we have a Father in Christ to approach unto; for us there is a Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness; we are interested in all the promises of a faithful God; and our sins are all pardoned. It is owing to this mercy that we have received the grace to believe in his name; and that we stand before God justified in the complete righteousness of his dear Son. Shall *we* forbear to praise him, *we*, who know that all things do work together for our good, and that shortly all our trials shall come to an end, when we shall enter into the rest which remaineth for the people of God. Even now we are favoured with his covenant mercies, as the foretaste and the first fruits of the everlasting mercies to be enjoyed hereafter.

Let us put our choicest mercies by the side of our deepest trials, and we shall then see what abundant cause we have for rejoicing. In

music it is not one sound, however beautiful, that constitutes a song, neither is it single notes that constitute harmony; there must be composition, the arranging of the notes; and to make harmony perfect, there will be often deep discord. So the notes of this glory-song are of judgment and mercy—judgment without wrath, judgment in the midst of mercies, judgment issuing in our greatest mercies; deep humblings, deep searchings, deep trials, deep afflictions.

Oh, beloved, we shall have to reckon these among the richest mercies we have received at the hands of our covenant God and Father. I will sing, said the Psalmist, of mercy and judgment; unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. The faithfulness that has never betrayed a promise, the power that has never been overcome, the wisdom that has led them by the right way, the love that has mingled itself with all the dispensations of the Lord's hand—this it is that constitutes the deep harmony of the song of God's people. They are deep and solemn notes, but they

have their echo and their unison with all the glorious attributes of God.

Oh, ye who are grieved in spirit, if you ask wherefore God is so repeatedly laying your comforts low, it is that you may the better sing, "Glory to God!" Ye sin-burdened souls, who feel that your sins are beyond pardon, and suppose your case desperate, give glory to God in confessing your sins before him, remembering that it is the glory of God to forgive sin. "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it." Done what? "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions." Sins of scarlet, deep as the crimson blood; and thus the Lord glorifies himself in Israel. Oh, remind Him in your prayers that He is glorified in pardoning sin, and in giving peace to the conscience of every mourning sinner who comes to him through Christ.

God is glorified by his people when they *repose trust and confidence in him*, and in acknowledging him in all their ways, and by a patient and cheerful submission to his holy

and righteous will, even though they may be in the furnace of affliction. Hence it is written, "Glorify ye the Lord in the fires," even as Abraham glorified God by his faith. Let us also gratefully remember that it is the glory of God to give unto his people all needful grace. Are you in affliction? are you neglected by those to whom you look for support? then remember that it is the glory of God to place beneath you the everlasting arms. Be careful for nothing, but that in all things God may be glorified in you, and by you.

And you may practically demonstrate your gratitude to the Lord for what he has done for you and in you, in *promoting God's glory in the world*, in diffusing his truth, and aiding his cause. Forget not, my brother, that this is to be the one great business of our lives; for the chief end of our existence is, that we may glorify God, and enjoy him for ever.

Oh, remember, my brother, that God has made all things for himself, even the wicked

for the day of evil. He will, therefore, be glorified in the salvation of his people, and —fearful truth—he will be glorified also in the condemnation and misery of all unbelieving and impenitent sinners!

When we think of all the goodness and mercy and tenderness manifested by our Heavenly Father in his dealings with us unworthy and ill-deserving sinners, what abundant cause have we to be thankful to our God, and to utter the memory of his great goodness! These are the blessings of the Lord which make rich, and add no sorrow thereunto; blessings which make us happy even in this wilderness below. So that now we have peace with God, the enjoyment of his presence, and the light of his countenance in endeared communion and fellowship with him; and when we are in the land of eternal rest, we shall sing "Unto him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

This glory is due to God *exclusively*. Seeing, therefore, that it is the gracious and unalterable purpose of God that his people shall be blessed by him with all temporal mercies and spiritual blessings, with grace here, and with the hope of the glory hereafter to be enjoyed by them, shall not we be forward to join, with all our ransomed and sanctified powers, in this glorious anthem? Oh, then let us take down our harps from the willows, and give all glory to His holy name; for to him, and to him alone, all the glory of our salvation belongs.

It is most evident, therefore, that no part of this glory can belong to the creature. What has the most eminent saint that he has not received. He *was* not, and even now he may say he *is* not; for he is nearer non-existence than full existence, and all his future prospects are entirely dependent on the goodness, the bounty, and the love of God. What, then, have we in ourselves to boast of? Boasting is altogether excluded

by the covenant of grace; for all we have and are, is of rich, free, and sovereign grace. If he have chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, it is entirely to "the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the Beloved;" and if we have been redeemed by the doing and dying of God's dear Son, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace." And if we have been called out of darkness into marvellous light, and if we have been quickened who were dead in trespasses and in sins, it is owing entirely to the exceeding riches of his grace; as it is written, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." We may well say, therefore, that all glory is due exclusively to him.

If, therefore, all glory is due unto the Lord our God, it is both fitting and binding

on us to render cheerfully unto him the thanks due to his holy name; and we may do this in our *private meditations* by thinking upon his loving-kindness, and by devout contemplation on the wonderful displays of his goodness. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

We may do it *vocally* in praising him. In prayer we supplicate for an enjoyment of these great blessings, but in our songs of thanksgiving we celebrate the praises of him who has answered our supplications. In prayer we ask for more grace. In praise we thank him for what he has given. There appears something less selfish in praising than in praying. The former seems most to have respect to the Divine glory; the latter to our own profit and advantage. I dare not say that the prayers of God's believing family do not glorify him. It is in God's purpose and promise to hear and answer prayer; and the faith of the humble penitent in prayer glorifies him. But God

never says of prayer what he says of praise, that "whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me." There is a remarkable instance of the honour God put upon the praises of his people recorded in the Second Book of Chronicles, the fifth chapter, the eleventh to the fourteenth verse: when praise was offered in the temple, "then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God." And if we direct our thoughts to the multitude before the throne, we shall find that praise is the employment of heaven. So the saints on earth are described as speaking of the glory of his kingdom. Oh, let us unite in the prayer and purpose of the Psalmist: "Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."

So also we glorify God by *a holy and consistent walk and conduct*. A fruitful life glorifies God. Living from day to day upon Christ's fulness glorifies God. Be con-

stantly living upon what he is, and what he has done. Glory in the cross of Christ. As your soul is filled with his constraining love, so will you be disposed and enabled to carry out this principle into all the details of life, into all your arrangements at home, and into all your engagements in the world. Remember the exhortation, "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." And saith our Saviour to his disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven."

In further meditating upon this ascription of glory to the God of all grace, as herein enjoined, observe who are the *persons* that are to be employed in taking part in this hallowed exercise. It is not a solitary note that would satisfy the Apostle; it was not his own note of praise merely that he would offer unto God. It is "in the church" this glorious anthem is to be sung, not merely by the members of the

Church at Ephesus, but by the whole family of God in heaven and earth. All who are called into the fellowship of the Gospel are placed under the weightiest obligations thus to glorify God. As it is to the church that God's greatest mercies have been displayed, so is it from the church that the greatest revenue of glory is due. It is in the Church God's presence is to be realized. "The Lord is there;" and by the solemnities of the sanctuary, and the administration of his word and ordinances, God has purposed to obtain the devout and grateful homage of his believing family. It is in his temple that every one shall speak of his glory. "Praise waiteth for God in Zion, and unto him shall the vow be performed." The world has its song, and fashion has its song, the man of pleasure has his song, the man of sin has his song; but there are many things in this song, wonderfully exalted things, which none but the members of the one, chosen, redeemed, called, and sanctified Church can sing, and which they only can

sing, as they are moved and wrought upon by the Holy Ghost.

If the believer in Jesus rejoice not, if he give not glory to God, none others will. The Lord hath chosen and formed his people, that he might be glorified in them and by them. As he hath said, "This people have I formed for myself, and they shall show forth my praise." For this they have special opportunities and resources; they have been taught of God, and have all needful help promised them for this very purpose. And if, beloved, the Church should withhold her meed of praise, none others can unite in this ascription. The great design of God in the salvation of his elect family, is that Christ may have placed upon his head his many crowns; and that by the power of God, in connection with the members of the one Church, there shall be a blessing on the world around us.

Observe the *medium* through which this glory is to be presented to God. The Apos-

tle called up the Church to unite with him in offering to God their warmest and most devoted praises for all the blessings derived from their union with, and faith in the Lord Jesus, and which flows through him from the very heart of God his Father; for as all blessings of grace and glory are received by the Church through Christ, so all the praises of the Church ascend to God through the same medium. As we are enjoined to ask for all blessings in the name of Christ, so our praises can only be accepted on the ground of his merit. Oh, let us glorify God for this medium as well as by it.

Consider, also, the *universality and perpetuity of this song.* It begins here; when shall it end? Though it is a new song, it is to be sung through the everlasting ages. Ah! blessed communion.

> "The saints above, and those below,
> But one communion make."

We think of those that are gone; we think of their happy state; we think of them

now praising a Triune God. O beloved! our song will never, never end.

To induce us to take part in this everlasting song, let us consider what *great and unspeakable advantages are to be realized,* in being thus engaged in glorifying God. Praise is not only in itself comely, but it is also exceedingly profitable; it is a great blessing for one's own soul. There is something in the fifty-seventh Psalm we shall do well frequently to meditate upon and pray over—"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise." Observe, a praising spirit results from a "heart fixed." Fixed in what? Fixed in the everlasting and well-ordered covenant; fixed in God; fixed in Jesus; settled, rooted, and grounded in him by the power of the Holy Ghost; lifted above frames, above feelings, above circumstances, and resting in the faithfulness of a covenant God. This blessed fixedness, wherever it is enjoyed, leads to praise.

There is another blessing connected with this spirit; it stands united with *great ho-*

liness of heart. The 101st Psalm is strong upon this point. "I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. Oh! when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before my eyes; I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me." Observe, therefore, a praising spirit is a holy spirit; it is a holy frame of soul. It makes a man jealous about sin; it stands connected with tenderness of conscience, with fear of offending God. The more praise there is, the more jealousy I feel lest I depart from that God, who is the object and the subject of my praise. It is not, therefore, for our comfort merely, but it is for our deep sanctification that we earnestly pray that we may, by God's grace, possess much of this spirit of praise; we shall then be more devoted, more humble, more tender, more submissive, and more what the saints of God ought to be.

Oh! who can utter *the blessings that stand connected with it, in reference to others?* You that are parents, be assured, the best sermon you can read your children, is to show them what the religion of the Gospel does for you. I remember the effect produced upon an ungodly man, when he saw his brother read a letter. The letter told him he was spoiled of all; all was taken from him; he read it over, and smiled. "You read this letter with a smile!" exclaimed the other; "it would send me to a mad-house." Ah! beloved, there is a power in the spirit that yields itself to God, and that praises God in the midst of deep trials, which by the blessing of the Holy Ghost has such an effect upon others as no language can describe. "My mother shows what the Gospel is; it makes her happy. My father shows what the Gospel is; it pacifies him; it gives him what I see not in others; I see it is that that elevates him, it is that that abases him, it is that that sanctifies him." Observe how the Psalmist

connected with it the conversion of others. "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." There is a power in the man who realizes the love of God in his soul, and shows that love. I speak not of fine speech, but there is more power in the utterance of a word —a prayer—a common text of Scripture—coming from such a man, than from sermons concerning which many have said, "How eloquent!"

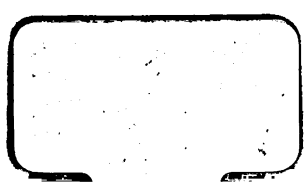
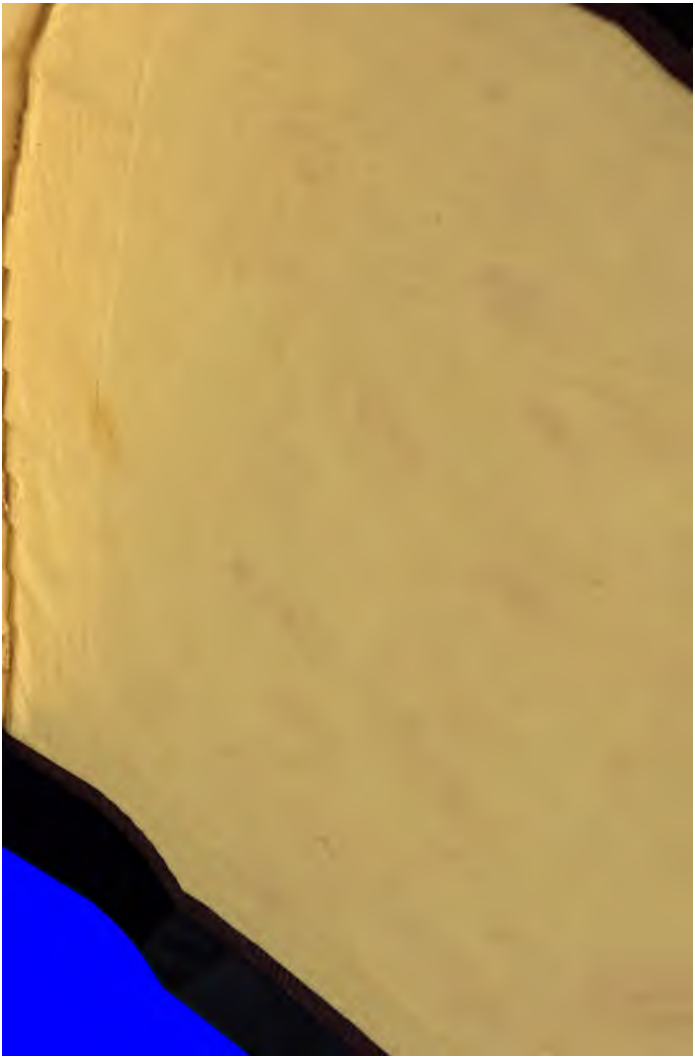
And as it is a blessing to the souls of others, so it is most pleasing to God. I need scarcely say there is not any perfection in God that faith does not honour; and yet, as I have said, I think that praise more glorifies God than any other spiritual act. It includes prayer; for where there is the spirit of praise, there is always the spirit of prayer; but you know there may be the spirit of prayer and not the spirit of praise.

One remark more. There is nothing so

dissonant in the ear of God, as for his song to be sung by unhallowed lips; as for a man to be full of sound in the things of God, and to have no unction of God in the spirit. It is, if I may take a quaint illustration, like several voices singing the same words to different tunes. Nothing can be more discordant. An unholy man praising God for justification, praising God for election, praising God for union with Christ! And at the same time his heart is full of the world, full of sin, full of himself. Many a professor will plead in the last day what he has done for God: "Have we not prophesied in thy name"? but he has never heartily joined in that concert, "Unto him be glory."

The most awful state in which a soul can be found, is where the means of grace are regularly attended, assent is given to the truths of the Gospel, and the hearer has a name to live; but where self has never been abased, self-will, self-righteousness, self-glory. Who are they who find Christ most precious, who

find sin a burden, and mourn for it, who value the throne of grace, and seek most earnestly the influences of the Spirit? It is they who can join in this most blessed song; and they shall sing it again one day in heaven itself.

Oh! blessed concord, blessed harmony, when "we show forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives!" One song; glorious concord! One song; beginning on earth, perfected in heaven! Wondrous song! Oh, wondrous trophy of God's grace, that shall lead us to begin upon earth a song, that shall never come to an end. It shall be sung through all times, to the remotest ages, and by successive generations.

Let us evermore seek grace, that we may heartily join in the concluding asseveration —the solemn "Amen"—of the Apostle, and in the sublime praise and prayer-song of the Psalmist—"Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things; and blessed be his glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen."